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Why Local Party Leaders Don't Support Nominating Centrists

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Abstract

Would giving party leaders more influence in primary elections in the U.S. decrease elite polarization? Some scholars have argued that political party leaders tend to support centrist candidates in the hopes of winning general elections. In contrast, we argue that many *local* party leaders—especially Republicans—may not believe that centrists perform better in elections and therefore may not support nominating them. We test this argument with an original survey of 1,118 county-level party leaders. In experiments, we find that local party leaders most prefer nominating candidates who are similar to typical co-partisans, not centrists. Moreover, given the choice between a more centrist and more extreme candidate, they strongly prefer extremists, with Democrats doing so by about 2 to 1 and Republicans by 10 to 1. Likewise, in open-ended questions, Democratic party leaders are twice as likely to say they look for extreme candidates relative to centrists; Republican party leaders are five times as likely. Potentially driving these partisan differences, Republican leaders are especially likely to believe that extremists can *win* general elections and overestimate the electorate's conservatism by double digits.

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Over the last fifty years, political parties at the national, state, and local levels in the U.S. have increasingly nominated ideologically extreme candidates.[1] During the same period, formal party leaders'[2] influence over party nominations has declined; outside groups now dominate many primaries (e.g., Masket 2009). Many scholars have suspected that these two trends are related, with parties' and formal party leaders' declining influence in primaries contributing to the declining number of party nominations going to centrist candidates (e.g., Persily 2015).

The scholars who expect party leaders to support centrists often argue that parties are "the sole political organizations whose primary goal is to win [general] elections" (La Raja and Schaffner 2015, see also Hassell (2017, 2018)) and that parties are more likely to win general elections when they nominate centrists (e.g., Hall 2015).[3] This line of reasoning suggests a way to decrease elite polarization: namely, by "enhancing the role of parties" and their leaders in primary elections through reforms that strengthen parties' autonomy, internal organization, financial resources, and power over candidate nominations (McCarty 2015, p. 143).

In this paper, we add an important caveat to this line of reasoning. Political party leaders at all levels of government influence candidate emergence and primaries—not just party leaders at the state or national levels that have been the focus of most recent work. And in *local* political parties, we argue, there are reasons to doubt that party leaders will act as advocates for centrist candidates.

Scholars have seldom studied the preferences of local party leaders, but they play a paramount role in the candidate entry process. In many areas, local party leaders recruit, screen, and support candidates for local, state legislative, and even national office (Crowder-Meyer 2010, 2011; Maisel 2001; Moncrief, Squire and Jewell 2001). They wield considerable influence over who runs and who wins (especially in primaries), thanks in part to recent changes in party structure and campaign finance (Hershey 2013). However, scholars have paid little attention to local party leaders' prefer-

[1]For evidence of polarization in policymaking at all these levels, see Barber (2016); de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2016, 2019); Fiorina and Abrams (2009); Lee (2009); Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013, 2014); Thomsen (2017).

[2]For concision, throughout "party leaders" refers to the formal leaders of official political party organizations (e.g., the chair of the Arlington County Democratic Party). Other work demonstrates informal leaders in parties (e.g., leaders of important interest groups) are also significant, but they are outside what we mean by the term "party leaders" here.

[3]Hassell (2018) finds support for a different mechanism, that party leaders may tend to personally support moderate candidates (see also May 1973).

ences in primaries; we do not know whether they share the affinity for moderate candidates that scholars have documented among state and national party leaders. Moreover, the political party structure in the US is more a "stratarchy"—a system in which each level has some power to act on its own—than a hierarchy in which higher levels of the party determine the behavior of lower levels (Eldersveld and Walton 2000).[4] We therefore cannot take for granted that U.S. local party leaders will mirror the views and behaviors of their counterparts at the national and state levels.

In contrast to much of the recent work on state and national party leaders, our theoretical argument in this paper is that U.S. local party leaders—especially Republicans—should often not think that centrists have strong advantages in elections, in part because of features of local politics that may bias their perceptions of the general electorate. Compared to state and national party leaders, for instance, local party leaders—and especially Republicans—are less insulated from ideologically extreme activist organizations, which actively seek to alter their perceptions of public opinion (e.g., Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Layman et al. 2010; Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016). Such activism has blossomed in recent years, especially on the political right (Blee and Creasap 2010; Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016). Moreover, compared to state and national party leaders, local party leaders tend to have less concrete information about public opinion (like detailed polling) that would allow them to form accurate perceptions of the general electorate. Compared to state and national parties, local parties are also easier for grassroots activists to capture by installing themselves and their allies as party leaders (Skocpol and Williamson 2011); Persily (2014) thus worries there may be cause to "fear...capture [of parties] by the extremes" (see also La Raja and Schaffner 2015, p. 22). Against this backdrop, we hypothesize that many local party leaders might not perceive strong electoral incentives to nominate centrists, which would in turn dampen their desire to nominate centrists or even lead them to prefer nominating extremists.

In this paper, we use an original survey of county party leaders—one of the few large-sample surveys of this population ever conducted—from which we gather a methodologically diverse set of

[4]Most U.S. local party leaders are not selected by state or national leaders, but rather are selected by caucuses or committees of activists. These lower level committees, in turn, are typically elected by precinct-level party caucuses open to all voters.

experimental and descriptive evidence. The methodologically diverse nature of our evidence means it has complementary strengths and weaknesses. Together, our findings present a rare glimpse at how local party leaders decide which candidates to back for their party's nomination. Our findings are generally consistent with the implications of our theoretical argument.

Our first finding is drawn from a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014; Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018) that showed party leaders hypothetical candidates with randomly assigned personal qualities, including ideology. We asked party leaders which candidates they would encourage to run, which would be more likely to win if nominated, and which would be more likely to remain loyal to the party if elected. Contrary to conclusions from research on national and state party leaders, local party leaders clearly prefer centrist candidates *the least*, instead most often favoring candidates who share the views of typical co-partisan voters. Party leaders in both parties even prefer nominating extremists to nominating centrists. Intriguingly, and consistent with our argument, local party leaders seemed to favor extremists to centrists in part because they did not believe their party would face an electoral penalty for nominating an extremist and did not therefore perceive an electoral incentive to nominate centrists, contrary to some of the rosier accounts of state and federal party leaders.

This conjoint experiment also uncovered a stark partisan difference: when faced with a choice between an even more extreme candidate and a moderate, Democratic party leaders prefer the extremist by a ratio of 2 to 1, whereas Republican party leaders prefer the extremist 10 to 1. Consistent with our theoretical argument, we show that Republican leaders believe that extremists are actually *more* likely to *win* general elections than centrists (whereas Democrats simply view extremists as not significantly more likely to lose). Republicans thus believe they "can have their cake and eat it, too": nominating extremists, they believe, provides both ideological and electoral rewards.

Our second finding concerns how party leaders perceive the public, further investigating the apparent differences between how Republican and Democratic party leaders think about the *electoral chances* of extreme candidates. We present data from survey items that asked party leaders

broad questions about how they perceive general public opinion in their districts. Consistent with the idea that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to see extremists as winning candidates, we find that both Democratic and Republican party leaders perceive public opinion in their counties as more conservative than it really is (compared to data from large public opinion surveys), a disconnect that may help explain Republicans' greater enthusiasm for extremely conservative candidates and Democrats' (relative) restraint when it comes to more extremely liberal candidates.

Finally, for our third finding, we present further evidence consistent with the conjoint experiment's finding that party leaders prefer nominating extreme candidates. This study uses data from a question that appeared on the paper version of the survey to examine what party leaders spontaneously say about the traits they look for in candidates for their party's nomination.[5] We find that party leaders rarely mention centrism or moderation but often spontaneously say that they prefer ideological loyalists. For example, Republican leaders mention conservatism as an ideal nominee trait over six times more often than they mention centrism.

Throughout, we show that our results are robust and generalize across partisan contexts: to counties that are evenly divided by party, to counties where each party is favored, and to counties that party chairs subjectively perceive as competitive. Weighting all our results by county size also does not affect our conclusions.

Our findings have two particularly important implications. First, to the extent that future reforms empower local party leaders, they may empower individuals who do not perceive the sharp trade-offs between candidates' extremity and electability that scholars have documented among state and national party leaders. Future reform proposals may therefore benefit from a more surgical approach, empowering national and state leaders who appear more supportive of centrists (Hassell 2018; La Raja and Schaffner 2015) while avoiding empowering local party leaders. Second, the findings presented here raise the possibility that local party leaders' preference for nominating extremists may already play a role in contributing to the asymmetric polarization of politicians and

[5]We term this a third study here because the basic research strategy is different. We wish to clarify, however, that what we term Finding 3 was carried out using the same survey instrument and was not from a different sample gathered at a different time.

policy at the local, state, and national levels.

Theoretical Argument and Existing Evidence

Many political observers argue that party leaders have lost influence in primary elections in the U.S., and that this development has in turn contributed to elite polarization at all levels of government.[6] The formal leaders of party organizations can influence primary elections in many ways: with their information, resources, and connections, they can recruit new candidates, direct financial and human resources to nominees they favor, and boost the fortunes of nominees they endorse (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Lawless 2012; Masket 2016). And because party leaders oversee "the sole political organizations whose primary goal is to win [general] elections" (La Raja and Schaffner 2015), many scholars argue that party leaders have historically used their influence to block extremist candidates, who might cost their party the general election (e.g., Hall 2015), in favor of candidates closer to the ideological center, who better balance their ideological and electoral concerns. Unfortunately, some scholars maintain, this process has broken down over the last several decades, as changes to nomination processes and campaign finance laws have reduced party leaders' influence in primaries and increased the influence of interest groups and activists (e.g., Masket 2009; Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016), who often back more ideologically extreme candidates. As party leaders' power over primaries has waned, scholars argue, their ability to keep extremist candidates at bay has waned, too.

Scholars have argued that these conclusions have important implications for political reformers. In particular, these studies suggest that interventions that increase party leaders' influence in primary elections could help to decrease elite polarization. In this view, newly-empowered (or perhaps, *re*-empowered) party leaders will use their influence to "clamp down on candidates and incumbents outside the mainstream" and throw their support behind centrists (Persily 2015, p. 132), thereby "exercis[ing] a moderating effect" in primaries (La Raja and Schaffner 2015, see also Barber and McCarty (2015); Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018)) that flows downstream into general

[6]For evidence of polarization see, among others, Caughey, Xu and Warshaw (2017); de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2016, 2019); Thomsen (2014, 2017).

elections and ultimately political institutions. According to this school of thought, party officials are a rare bulwark against extremism and polarization that needs to be reinforced. Because of this belief, for example, La Raja and Schaffner (2015, Ch. 6) argue for "a party-centered system of campaign finance" that dramatically relaxes or eliminates spending limits on party organizations, frees party organizations to provide unlimited financial and in-kind aid to candidates, and redirects public financing to party organizations. For these scholars, more influence for party leaders could be an important cure to growing polarization.

Most work in this school of thought has focused on national and state party leaders, and largely side-stepped local party organizations. We believe that local parties are important for two reasons, however. First, in many areas, local party leaders already play an important role in recruiting, screening, and supporting candidates for local, state legislative, and even national office (Crowder-Meyer 2010, 2011). For example, in a survey of candidates for state legislative office, we found over 57% of candidates indicated that their local party organization was important in encouraging them to run for office (Broockman et al. 2015).[7] Likewise, in the survey of local party leaders we present below, 46% said they "played a very important role in recruiting or supporting primary election candidates" for state legislature or U.S. House.[8] Second, many reforms intended to empower national and state party leaders to play a larger role in primaries—such as campaign finance rules that advantage parties and disadvantage outside groups in primaries—may empower local leaders to play a larger role, too.[9]

Unfortunately for the cause of ideological moderation, many local party leaders may have

[7]This figure echoes previous studies which similarly found local parties play a substantial role in candidate recruitment. Almost half of state legislative candidates surveyed in 1997-1998 reported they had been encouraged to run by local party leaders (Moncrief, Squire and Jewell 2001), and 35% of those identified as strong potential candidates for Congress in the Candidate Emergence Study reported having been encouraged to run by local parties—contacts which substantially increased these potential candidates' likelihood of seeking office (Maisel 2001). Both of these studies were conducted during the late 1990s, and evidence suggests local parties are at least as active today as during that time (Hershey 2013).

[8]Moreover, even the chairs who solely recruit for local offices play an important role in "building the bench" of candidates who will be in a good position to run for higher office; research suggests that the supply of candidates plays an important role in generating elite polarization (Thomsen 2017).

[9]In fact, national party leaders have intentionally allocated funding to strengthen lower-level parties, providing money for field directors in rural areas and other efforts which may enhance local party leaders' strength (Hershey 2013).

different preferences in primaries than their national and state counterparts. That is, there are good reasons to doubt that local party leaders are as firmly opposed to extreme candidates as state and national party leaders.

For one, we suspect that many local party leaders are highly exposed to forces that bias their perceptions of the general electorate, leading them to believe that the general electorate is more open to ideologically extreme candidates.[10] In recent years, sophisticated activist networks have often worked to barrage local elites with expressions of support for extreme policies, via direct communication, at town halls, with protests, through partisan media, and more (Goss 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2005; Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016; Skocpol and Williamson 2011). A principal aim of these tactics is to alter elites' perceptions of public opinion and of the electoral viability of polarized candidates. As leaders reflect on what kind of nominees voters prefer, they may think of the most vocal activists (Miler 2009). Where these efforts succeed, local party leaders may tend to think voters are more ideologically extreme and may not worry that extreme nominees could cost them the general election.

Second, unlike state and national party leaders, many local party leaders may not have the organizational resources that might otherwise offset these perceptual biases, such as detailed polling, extensive data on a large number of candidates, detailed voter files, and so on. Just as researchers with strong priors and small samples are more likely to reach extreme conclusions, local party leaders with fewer informational resources may be more likely to conclude that their voters are ideologically extreme.

Third, selection could also play a role: people who believe their polarized ideologies are favored in general elections (versus those who do not) might be more likely to agree to serve as party chairs in the first place (Thomsen 2017).

In contemporary U.S. politics, we expect these kinds of patterns to be especially pronounced

[10]Our theoretical argument is agnostic with respect to the level of government at which local party leaders are influencing primaries. Consistent with this agnosticism, we explicitly varied the level of government in Finding 1 below and did not find evidence that the results meaningfully differed. Our argument also has implications for all levels of government: in many areas, local party leaders recruit candidates for all levels of government, and reforms that empower parties in general may empower the local party leaders who are not currently involved in primaries for a given level of government.

among Republican local party officials. At the local level, left-leaning organizations have atrophied in recent decades, while their conservative counterparts are experiencing something of a renaissance (in part thanks to strategic investments by conservative donors and organizations and a rich network of conservative media outlets that include television, internet, and radio (Blee and Creasap 2010; Skocpol and Williamson 2011)). Consistent with these patterns, recent studies suggest that Republican state legislative officials over-estimate public support for conservative positions, but that Democrats do not over-estimate public support for liberal positions (Broockman and Skovron 2018). Other evidence suggests that Republican elites think differently about how to succeed in general elections, believing that nominating extremists allows them to 'fire up the base' (Buchler 2015). In light of these differences, we expect Republican local party leaders to be especially likely to think that ideologically extreme candidates can win elections.

Of course, our argument about local party leaders represents a significant departure from much of the recent work on national and state-level party leaders. This work has argued that state and national party leaders tend to prefer moderates (La Raja and Schaffner 2015; Hassell 2018), but these state and national leaders may be different than local party leaders: they have access to sophisticated organizational and informational resources, and they focus on a broader set of election outcomes. However, even the scholars who have studied national and state party leaders have recently wondered whether their findings extend to local party leaders and expressed concern about the possibility that local parties "nurture...ideological activists" (La Raja and Schaffner 2015, p. 22; see also Persily (2014)).[11] Our original studies bear out these concerns and join other evidence (e.g., Buchler 2015) that raises doubts about whether party leaders are truly the moderating force they are depicted as, at least at the local level. Our data also supports the novel mechanism we identified as a potential contributor to local party leaders' cool reception for centrists: most local party leaders—and especially Republicans—appear to prefer nominating typical partisans and even extremists over centrists because they do not think that centrists are more electable.

[11]There is also some evidence that national party leaders' preference for moderate candidates diminishes ahead of competitive general elections (Hassell 2018), inconsistent with elites even at this level necessarily believing moderates are more electable.

Data

To better understand local party leaders' support for ideologically centrist candidates, and to determine whether their perceptions of the electorate might underlie their preferences, we fielded a national survey of the chairs of the county-level (or equivalent)[12] branches of both parties in 2013.[13] We chose to study county leaders for several reasons. First, they are often the most active local party organizations in primary elections for state and federal office (Crowder-Meyer 2011; Lawless 2012); over 78% of the party chairs in our sample indicated that people in their county party organization have helped support a candidate in a primary for an open seat. Counties also provide a well-defined sampling frame that allow us to assess the representativeness of our respondents.[14]

To administer the survey, we first manually compiled contact information for 6,219 county party chairs. We gathered this information by searching the internet for the name of every county in the US together with the name of each of the two major parties. In November 2013, we sent each chair a pre-notification and then a survey invitation at his or her email and/or postal addresses. (If both were available, we attempted contact at both.) We received responses from 1,118 chairs (18%), a response rate comparable to recent surveys of politicians (e.g., Broockman and Skovron 2018) and double that of many mass public surveys.

[12]Some states do not have county parties but instead have parties at the parish (LA), borough (AK), district (ND), city (CT), multi-county (MN), or sub-city (MA Democrats) level. For simplicity we nevertheless refer to all respondents as "county chairs" throughout.

[13]Nine states were excluded because neither party provided contact information for county officials: GA, IN, IA, KY, MI, NH, NM, OK, and WI. These states do not appear to meaningfully differ in terms of their political composition; Obama's two-party vote share in 2012 was just 1.4 percentage points higher on average in the states we surveyed versus the states we did not.

[14]We also hoped to survey state and national party leaders—who we suspect are less susceptible to the kinds of biases and subsequent preferences for extreme candidates that we describe here—so that we could compare them to local party leaders. Unfortunately, we were unable to conduct such a comparison; when we surveyed state party chairs, just one of the 100 we contacted completed the survey. Our data shed light on how county-level party leaders think—and they lead to strikingly different conclusions than past research on national and state party leaders—but we hope that future research will be able to directly compare state and local party officials with a single common survey instrument.

Representativeness

We conducted extensive checks of the representativeness of our respondents. As we face space constraints, we review them briefly here and present them in full in Online Appendix B. Response rates were nearly identical by region; for Republican (18.0%) and Democratic chairs (17.9%); and for chairs identified as men (18.2%) and women (18.5%). One potential concern is that only party chairs in un-competitive areas would respond. However, Figure OA6 shows that the underlying partisan composition of the areas where our respondents are from is fairly representative in both parties. Another possibility is that only chairs from very small counties would respond. Figure OA7 shows that we received a similar response rate in counties of all sizes, and if anything very slightly more responses from larger counties. Another potential concern is that the most ideologically polarized party leaders would select into our survey. This does not appear to be the case: we compare our survey to a previous survey that secured a very high response rate (45.5%) and found a very similar distribution of reported personal ideology within both parties (Figure OA10). Formal tests of the representativeness of our respondents' counties are in Appendix Table OA3.

Finding 1: Chairs Do Not Prefer Centrists in a Conjoint Experiment

Our first piece of evidence is drawn from a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014; Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018). Conjoint experiments force respondents to make trade-offs between two possible choices that differ along several dimensions. Providing respondents with a forced choice allows for a statistical estimation of average revealed preferences over each dimension. Providing multiple dimensions enhances the naturalism of respondents' choices.

In our experiment, we asked county party chairs to pick which of two possible candidates they would prefer to run in their party's primary for an open seat. Our experiments began, "Suppose there is a primary for an open [county board / state legislative / US House][15] seat in your county

[15]The level of government was randomized to assess the robustness of the results. The results do not meaningfully differ based on the level of government displayed.

and the two individuals below are considering running." The survey then described "Candidate A" and "Candidate B" by displaying two side-by-side lists of the candidates' personal attributes. After the local party leaders viewed the candidates, we asked "Which of the above candidates would you be more likely to encourage to run for office?" Online Appendix E gives the full language for each condition and shows how the survey appeared to respondents.

Each aspect of each candidate's biography was independently generated at random: the survey supplied each candidate's gender (signaled by first name), age, occupation, experience in the party, life circumstances, personal characteristics, and political ideology. For political ideology, we described some candidates as more moderate than the typical voter in their party (for Democrats, more conservative; for Republicans, more liberal); we described other candidates as similar in ideology to typical party members; still others we described as more extreme than typical party members (for Democrats, more liberal; for Republicans, more conservative).[16] Providing several traits for each candidate beyond ideology was intended to enhance naturalism and to assess the relative importance of ideology to chairs' judgments compared to other potentially relevant traits. All traits (ideology, gender, etc.) were independently randomized, allowing us to compare how party leaders reacted to candidates with each trait to estimate the effects of each trait, as each trait is uncorrelated with the others by design. Each party leader was shown only one conjoint matchup (because the survey was also administered on paper, making multiple matchups impractical).

Table 1 lists the attributes that the hypothetical candidates could have. Attributes were fully randomized, with the exception of age, which was constant, with the first profile always being 43 years old and the second profile always being 47 years old. Two different sets of first names were used for the two profiles in order to ensure that no pair of candidates had the same name. Figure OA11 in the Online Appendix shows how a respondent on the online survey would have seen the

[16]We chose this operationalization of candidate ideology because we thought it would be the easiest for chairs to understand. We also did not want to introduce social desirability bias by using elected officials as a reference point, because this would mean our survey implicitly asked chairs to describe whether they thought the existing officeholders in their area were sufficiently liberal or sufficiently conservative, which we thought they might regard as too politically sensitive. Finally, in conceptualizing the influence of party elites in primaries, the kinds of candidates that would otherwise prevail if median primary voter ideology were well-represented represents a theoretically-motivated baseline scenario.

experiment.

Because party leaders are difficult to survey, our experiments exposed them to just one head-to-head pairing, in the hopes of discouraging attrition. Obviously, this reduces our statistical power, although as the results show below, our key predictions remain highly statistically significant.[17]

Table 1: List of Random Treatments in Conjoint Experiment.

Attribute	Values
Name (gender)	Male names: Donald, Laurence, Nathan, Nicholas, Samuel, Alexander, Andrew, Christopher, Charles, Daniel. Female names: Donna, Lauren, Natalie, Nicole, Samantha, Alexandra, Andrea, Charlotte, Christina, Danielle. (No pair of candidates had the same name.)
Age	43, 47
Occupation	Attorney, business executive, investor, lawyer, nurse, small business owner, social worker, teacher, receptionist, restaurant server, factory worker
Experience in party	Active and well known in county party organization, active and well known in group important to the party, frequent campaign volunteer for the last four election cycles, frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle, none
Life circumstances	Has a great deal of free time, has two young children, has flexible work hours, is independently wealthy, military veteran
Talents	Assertive, experienced fundraiser for local charities, hard worker, physically attractive, talented public speaker, well known in community
Positions and ideology	Much more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county, somewhat more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county, similar views to the typical voter from your party in your county, somewhat more liberal than the typical voter from your party in your county, much more liberal than the typical voter than the typical voter from your party in your county

Note: Each potential candidate had one attribute from the listed options for each category. Traits were independently randomized, with the exception of age, which was held constant in each profile.

[17]While presenting respondents with seven attributes for each candidate might cause concern over respondent fatigue, the fact that we presented only one conjoint comparison improves the likelihood that respondents did not satisfice on this item because of fatigue. Bansak et al. (2018) find that, even with many more attributes and many more conjoint tasks than we presented our respondents, respondents rarely satisfice.

Results: Who Party Leaders Prefer To Run

Figure 1a shows the share of party leaders who selected each candidate type conditional on being shown that type, with 95% confidence intervals overlaid.[18] (Recall that other candidate attributes were also shown, but that these other traits are uncorrelated with the ideological types by design.) The results show that local party leaders do not prefer to nominate centrists. In fact, party leaders in both parties are the *least* likely to prefer nominating centrist candidates: Democrats are the least likely to select a candidate more conservative than their typical party member and Republicans are the least likely to select a candidate more liberal ($p < 0.01$ for both comparisons). For example, Republicans selected a candidate more centrist (i.e., more liberal) than their party in only 7% of the match-ups in which such candidates were shown. Contrary to the hope that local party leaders might be a force for moderation, we find that they most prefer candidates who resemble their co-partisans and next prefer candidates even more extreme than that.

To communicate the magnitude of these differences, we next consider the cases where party leaders were presented with a choice where one candidate was more centrist than their party and where one was more extreme.[19] In these cases, party leaders preferred the more extreme candidate 76% of the time, or by a more than 3-to-1 margin ($p < 0.01$). Disaggregating the data by party reveals that this is largely driven by Republican party chairs. Democratic party chairs preferred extremists to centrists 63% of the time ($p < 0.01$), but Republicans preferred extremists to centrists 91% of the time, or by about 10 to 1 ($p < 0.01$). To illustrate the size of these differences, Figure 1b shows the 'win margin' of the extremist candidate in these extremist-versus-centrist match-ups, subtracting the share of party leaders who preferred the centrist nominee from the share who supported the extremist nominee. The error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

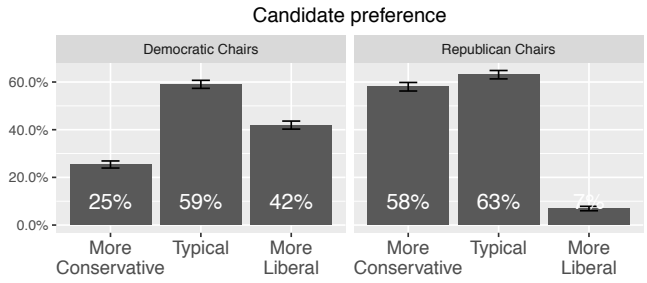
Figures 1c and 1d demonstrate the robustness and generalizability of this finding. We first examine whether our results persist in competitive counties (since party leaders who are guaranteed to win or lose regardless of the candidate they nominate may have less incentive to support

[18] Full results for all the conjoint dimensions are shown in Online Appendix F.

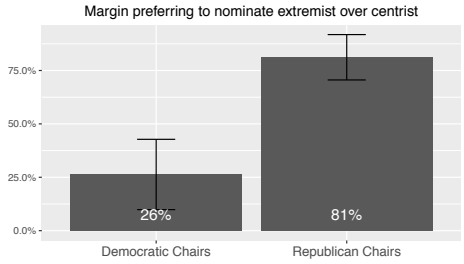
[19] Due to the random assignment, other candidate traits remain uncorrelated with candidate ideology, and the chairs who received these matchups are statistically identical to the broader sample.

Figure 1: Party Leaders Tend to Prefer More Extreme Candidates Over Centrists

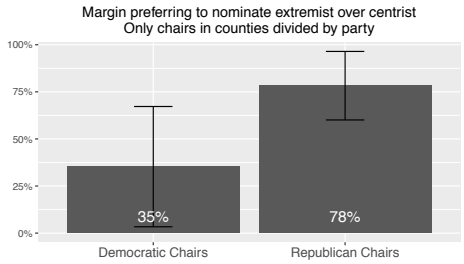
(a) Share selecting candidate with each ideology



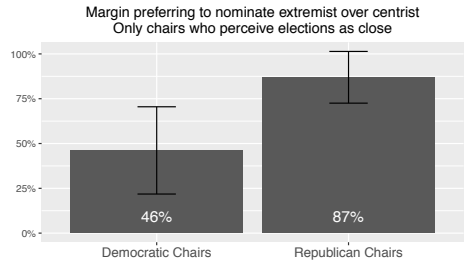
(b) 'Win margin' of extremists over centrists



(c) Robustness: objectively competitive counties



(d) Robustness: subjectively competitive counties



Note: Estimates (and 95% confidence intervals) are based on hypothetical candidate conjoint experiments embedded in a national survey of county-level party chairs conducted in 2013. Panel (a) shows the probability that a chair selected a candidate of each type conditional on being shown a candidate of that type, regardless of the other hypothetical candidate's type. The remaining panels calculate the differences between more extreme and more moderate candidates conditional on chairs being shown candidates of both types in a single hypothetical head-to-head. "More conservative" collapses candidates who were "much more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county" with candidates who were "somewhat more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county;" the "more liberal" category does the same symmetrically for liberal candidates.

moderates, and since competitive counties would be most likely to be affected by any reform that empowered party leaders). Figure 1c shows results for the subset of county party chairs in *objectively* competitive counties, where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012;[20] and Figure 1d shows the subset of county party chairs who *subjectively* perceive general

[20] 34% of respondents' counties satisfied this criteria.

elections in their area as competitive.[21] As Figures 1c and 1d illustrate, if anything, party chairs who perceive elections in their area as more likely to be up for grabs are *more* likely to prefer extremist nominees, with Republican party chairs in such areas preferring extremists by 15 to 1.

In Online Appendix Figure OA2,[22] we also show that the results remain unchanged within both Republican-leaning and Democratic-leaning counties. For example, even in Democratic-leaning counties, Republican chairs are the least likely to select centrist candidates. Our findings are also essentially unchanged when we weight by county population; they do not reflect that party chairs over-represent small counties that may tend to be conservative.[23]

Finally, in Online Appendix Section F.2, we apply a Bonferroni correction to the full conjoint models to account for the multiple comparisons and find that the key AMCEs remain significant. Because our main findings in the paper are generally associated with very small p-values, this correction would not change any of our main findings. For example, for the finding in this section in Figure 1b, the p-value for the comparison between Democrats' and Republicans' preference for extremists is 2.18×10^{-6}, meaning we would need to have conducted $458,294$ comparisons for a Bonferroni correction to render it insignificant.

Potential Mechanism: Perceptions of Candidate Electability

After party leaders selected which primary candidate they preferred, we also asked them which of the two candidates they thought would be more likely to win the general election and which of the two candidates would be more likely to stay loyal to the party if elected. Unsurprisingly, party

[21] We asked party leaders what share of offices their county party reliably won and include in this category those who indicated their party won between 26-50% or 51-75% of the time. 35% of respondents' counties satisfied this criteria. The counties that chairs perceive as competitive and the counties that we code as objectively competitive are often not the same. This discrepancy is partially to be expected because of the different geographic units at hand. To measure objective competitiveness we use countywide presidential vote, as it is impossible to measure the competitiveness of all the relevant elections (state legislative, mayoral, etc.) that occur within every county and in districts that include parts of multiple counties. However, our question to the chairs to assess their subjective perceptions was about "political offices in their "area in general; and it is likely that some countries that are skewed towards one party nevertheless have some competitive state legislative districts within them, for example. We therefore see both these measures as useful but imperfect measures of areas where chairs are operating in competitive electoral environments.

[22] Figure OA2 also shows Figure 1a within objectively and subjectively competitive counties.

[23] We also found no significant interaction between candidate ideology and candidate gender. However, candidate gender and ideology do correlate in the population of potential candidates (Thomsen 2015), meaning that local party chairs' preference for extreme candidates still has consequences for gender representation.

leaders were significantly more likely to initially select candidates who they perceived as having these qualities, by about a 4 to 1 margin for each.[24] And, as expected, Figure OA3 shows that both sides recognize that extremists are very likely to toe the party line.

More surprising are party leaders' perceptions of electability—and the partisan differences in these perceptions. Figure 2a shows that both Democratic and Republican chairs did not see more centrist candidate as more electable. In fact, the main pattern in both parties is that leaders saw more liberal candidates as the least electable ($p < 0.01$). This means that Republican chairs were *most* skeptical about the electoral appeal of more moderate (i.e., liberal) Republicans relative to typical or extreme Republicans. Democrats were most skeptical of more extreme (i.e., liberal) Democrats' electoral appeals, but still saw typical Democrats as most electable.

To better illustrate this pattern, Figure 2b again focuses on cases when party leaders faced a choice between an extremist and a centrist. Democratic chairs are slightly more likely to see centrist candidates as more electable than extremists, although this difference is not statistically significant in match-ups between the two. The picture is quite different for Republican party chairs. Republican chairs see extremist candidates as *more* likely to win general elections. 75% of Republican party chairs indicated they thought the extremist candidate they saw in the conjoint would be more likely to win the general election than the centrist candidate they saw, a margin of 50% for the extremist candidates ($p < 0.01$). This difference persists for Republican chairs who work in closely divided counties and is even larger for Republican chairs who subjectively perceive elections in their areas as close.

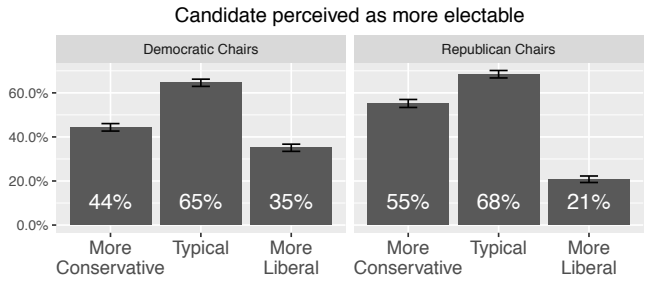
In Online Appendix Figure OA4,[25] we also show that the results remain unchanged within both Republican-leaning and Democratic-leaning counties; even in Democratic-leaning counties, Republican chairs see centrist candidates as the least electable. In Republican-leaning counties, Democratic chairs do begin to see centrists as more electable than extremists; however Figure OA2b shows that they still do not prefer nominating them there. These results are also unchanged

[24] We cannot rule out, though, that the chairs attributed these qualities to their chosen candidate in order to justify their choice.

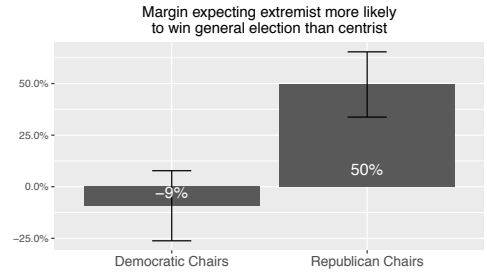
[25] Figure also OA4 also shows Figure 2a within objectively and subjectively competitive counties.

Figure 2: Do Party Leaders Perceive Extreme Candidate as Less Electable?

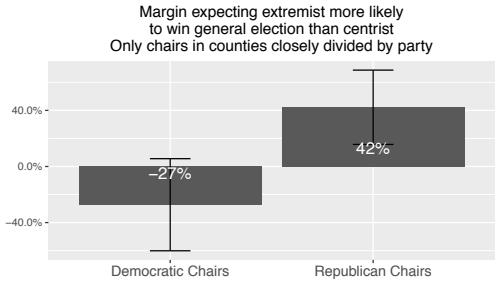
(a) Share seeing each candidate as most electable



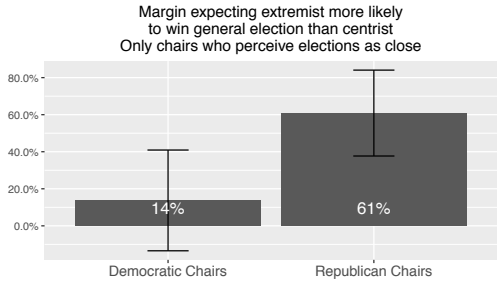
(b) Margin seeing extremists as more electable than centrists



(c) Robustness: objectively competitive counties



(d) Robustness: subjectively competitive counties



Note: Estimates (and 95% confidence intervals) are based on hypothetical candidate conjoint experiments embedded in a national survey of county-level party chairs conducted in 2013. Panel (a) shows the probability that a chair selected a candidate of each type as the more electable candidate, conditional on being shown a candidate of that type and regardless of the other hypothetical candidate's type. The remaining panels calculate the differences between more extreme and more moderate candidates conditional on chairs being shown candidates of both types in a single hypothetical head-to-head. "More conservative" collapses candidates who were "much more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county" with candidates who were "somewhat more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county;" the "more liberal" category does the same symmetrically for liberal candidates.

when we weight by county population; they do not reflect that party chairs over-represent small counties that may tend to be conservative.

We also asked party chairs which candidate they thought would be most likely to recruit enough volunteers and raise enough money. Figure OA5 shows the results. Consistent with the general electability findings, Republicans think extreme candidates are the most likely to do both.

Together, these results suggest an intriguing explanation for why Republican party chairs prefer extreme candidates for their party's nomination over centrists: unlike Democrats, Republican party

chairs across contexts appear to believe they can 'have their cake and eat it, too' by nominating extremists, reaping both electoral and ideological rewards.

Of course, this evidence has several important limitations. First, it assumes party leaders can understand or are prone to think in terms of ideological labels. Second, it relies on party chairs' perceptions of their party as a benchmark against which to compare potential candidates. However, as we show in the next section, Republicans if anything overestimate the public's conservatism, meaning that even the candidates they perceive as similar to partisan voters may in fact also be somewhat extreme relative to Republican voters. And, third, this evidence does not directly tap party leaders' views about voters themselves. If it is really the case that Republican leaders at the local level think that extremists fare well in elections, we might expect them to not just think extreme candidates are more electable, but for them to also perceive voters as more conservative than they really are. We take up this possibility in the next section.

Finding 2: Party Leaders Misperceive Public Opinion

If (as existing work concludes) party leaders at the national and state level work to block extreme candidates in the hopes of winning general elections, could it really be the case that local Republican party chairs see extreme candidates as *more* electable, and that they see the electorate differently than their Democratic counterparts? To further investigate this finding in a methodologically distinct way, we asked party leaders about their general beliefs about *public opinion* in their counties and their states.[26]

Data

To ascertain party leaders' perceptions of public opinion, we asked them to estimate public opinion in their county and in their state on several issues. Specifically, we asked them "What percent of people living in your state would agree with the following statements?" and "What

[26]Our design follows Broockman and Skovron (2018), who find that state legislative candidates overestimate support for conservative policies in their districts, with Republicans being especially prone to doing so. While Broockman and Skovron (2018) focus on establishing politicians' misperceptions of public opinion generally, our specific focus is to establish whether party chairs share these misperceptions, which could provide a plausible mechanism for Republican chairs' belief that ideological extremists are electable.

percent of people living in your county would agree with the following statements?" followed by a series of statements taken verbatim from a public opinion survey (described below). Each party chair made estimates of public opinion for their state and their county on three randomly selected issues. We asked them to estimate public opinion in both their state and in their county. We expected these boundaries to be well-known to county party chairs, especially as the chairs indicated that they are active in primaries for countywide and statewide office.

To compare party leaders' perceptions to reasonably precise estimates of reality, we asked party chairs to estimate county and state opinion on issues that had been asked in the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a large sample survey (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2013). We were therefore constrained in the kinds of issues we could ask about, as the CCES only asked its full sample about their opinions on a limited set of issues. Fortunately, the policy domains the CCES questions covered were almost all salient at all levels of government in the U.S.[27] For example, the issue of immigration was not only a federal matter; states, counties, and cities had salient debates over issues such as whether to act as "sanctuaries" for unauthorized immigrants and whether to grant them drivers licenses. These policy domains were thus almost all relevant to the politics of all levels of government, meaning these questions are relevant to ask local party leaders regardless of the levels of government at which they were most active in supporting candidates for office.[28]

Table 2 reports the text of the issue items in the 2012 CCES that were available, as well as the

[27]Policy issues pending in state legislatures around this time provide an instructive example. As mentioned above, many county party chairs are actively involved in recruitment for state legislative offices, and the CCES issues we asked about have frequently been the subject of state laws enacted since 2012. For example, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) indicates that more than 100 immigration-related laws were enacted by the states *every year* from 2012-2017, with the exception of 2016 (National Conference of State Legislatures 2017). Likewise, the NCSL also found that states enacted 344 abortion restrictions between 2011 and July 2016 (National Conference of State Legislatures 2016). On the issue of guns, more than 600 state laws concerning guns have been enacted since the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting (Vasilogambros 2018). Same-sex marriage had not yet been nationally legalized in 2013, meaning this remained an active issue in state politics; non-discrimination protections for gays and lesbians were also actively debated in local politics during this time.

[28]The issues cover a broad array of different issues and vary in terms of whether they represent liberal and conservative proposals, but most are social issues. Unfortunately this was a constraint imposed by the 2012 CCES' item selection. However, our theory is corroborated by the other two studies in this paper, and other research on politicians' perceptions of public opinion has not found differences between economic and social issues (Broockman and Skovron 2018), which suggests that our findings here would not differ if we were able to study economic issues.

ideological direction of the "Yes" side and whether the policy represented a status quo change in 2013. We also report weighted national mean support for each issue in the CCES.[29]

Table 2: Issue Questions on Party Leader Surevy (from 2012 CCES)

CCES Issue Item Wording	National Mean Support in CCES	"Yes" direction	Status quo change?
"Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry."	53%	Liberal	Some states
"Grant legal status to all illegal immigrants who have held jobs and paid taxes for at least 3 years, and not been convicted of any felony crimes."	48%	Liberal	Yes
"Laws governing the sale of firearms should be made less strict than they are."	13%	Conservative	Yes
"Let employers and insurers refuse to cover birth control and other health services that violate their religious beliefs."	37%	Conservative	Yes
"By law, abortion should never be permitted."	12%	Conservative	Yes
"Always allow a woman to obtain an abortion as a matter of choice."	49%	Liberal	Yes

Note: This table lists the issues on which party leaders were asked their perceptions of state- and county-level public opinion. Question wording is taken from the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. The second column computes weighted national mean support in the entire 2012 CCES. The third column reports whether answering "Yes" to the survey item reflects taking a liberal or conservative position. The fourth column reports whether the question would have reflected a status quo change in 2012.

Empirical Strategy 1: Raw Data

Because each state and county has a relatively small number of CCES respondents, special care is required to compare party leaders' estimates of public opinion with the CCES' estimates of true public opinion. We use two approaches that both yield similar results.

Our first approach simply compares the average party leader's perceptions to the average CCES estimate of average county-level public opinion (across the counties where party chairs responded to our survey). Our estimation strategy follows Broockman and Skovron (2018) and is formalized

[29]Recent high-profile errors of national and state polls provide some caution about these results, but we will show that the magnitude of the differences between CCES-measured opinion and party leaders' perceptions are much larger than these errors.

in Appendix Section C. The salient point about this approach is that it does not require large county-level samples to yield accurate estimates of how party leaders' perceptions of public opinion differ from the CCES estimates of public opinion on average. In brief, using the CCES data, we estimate public opinion in the average county or state—what party leaders' average perceptions would be if their perceptions were perfectly accurate. This quantity can be interpreted as 'the expectation of county or state opinion for a party chair respondent chosen at random.' We also estimate party leaders' mean perception and compare the two quantities. We cluster the standard errors at the county level for our county analysis and at the state level for our state analysis. Note that the county analysis excludes the states where parties are not organized at the county level because the levels at which these parties are organized (parish, etc.) are not available in the CCES data: LA, AK, ND, CT, and MA.

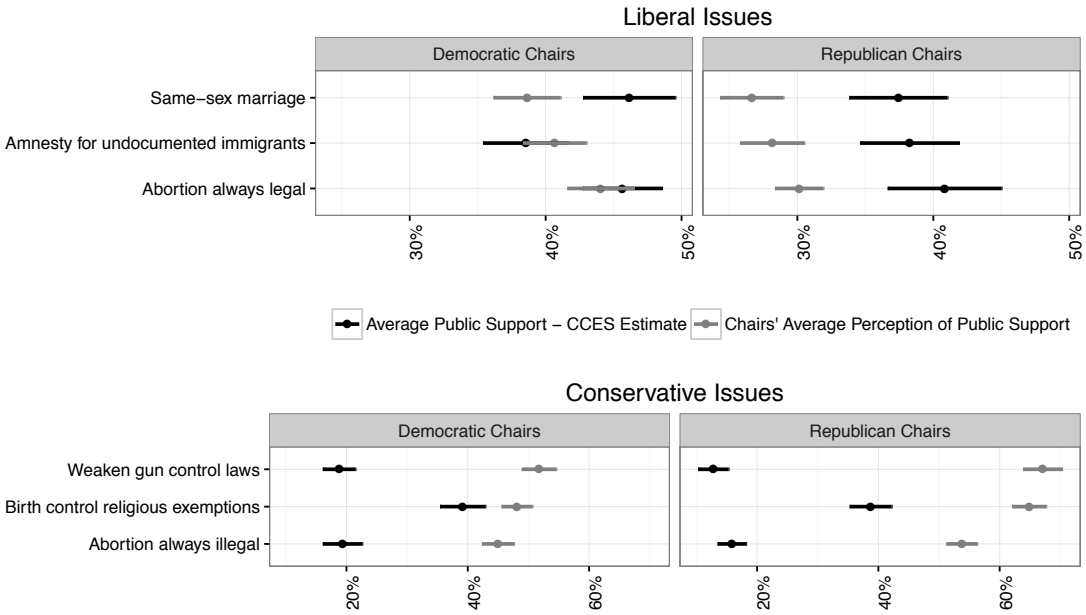
Results: Republican Party Leaders Overestimate The Public's Conservatism

Consistent with Finding 1 that Republican party leaders perceive extreme conservatives as *more* electable, our public opinion perception data indicate that Republican county party leaders perceive the public in their counties and states as more conservative than the CCES suggests that it is. Figure 3a shows our estimates for party leaders' perceptions of public opinion in their counties and our estimates from the CCES of what their average perceptions should have been were they perfectly accurate. Table 3 shows point estimates as well as the sample size of CCES respondents. Because thousands of CCES respondents form each point estimate, these point estimates are relatively precise.

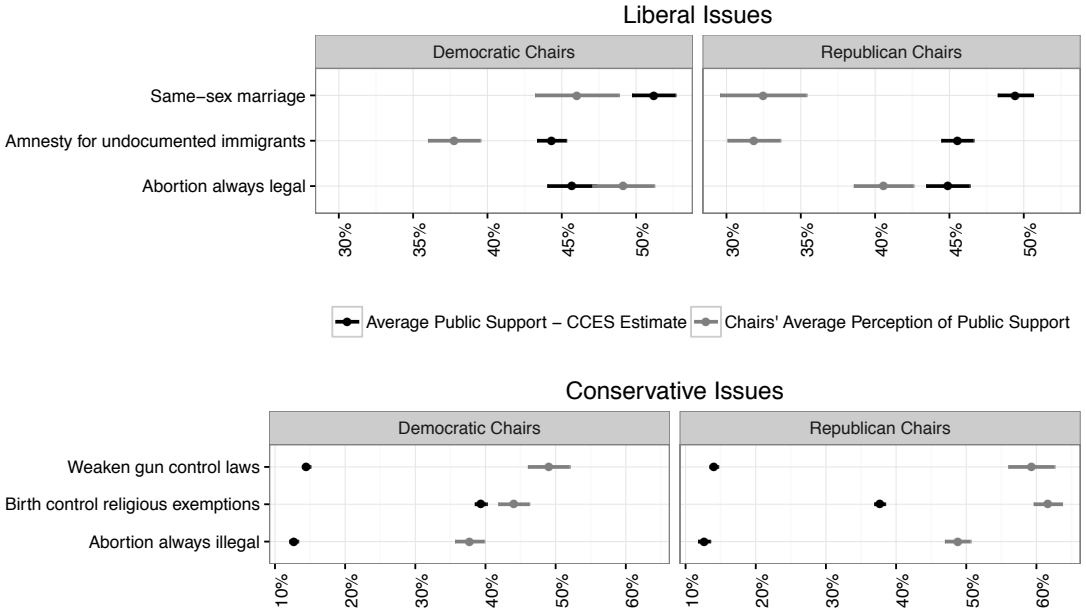
On average, Republican leaders appear to underestimate public support for the liberal policies on the CCES by about 10 percentage points and to overestimate public support for the conservative policies on the CCES by almost 40 percentage points. For example, only 13% of CCES respondents believe that "Laws governing the sale of firearms should be made less strict than they are," but Republican county party leaders perceive their counties as 67% supportive. On the other hand, the CCES evidence indicates that about 37% of people in the typical county supported same-sex

Figure 3: Party Leaders Think Public Opinion is More Conservative Than It Is

(a) County opinion



(b) State opinion



Note: Each panel plots average public support estimated from the CCES in counties (Panel (a)) and states (Panel (b)) weighted to reflect average public opinion in the county or state of a party leader respondent chosen at random (black points with whiskers reflecting 95% confidence intervals). In grey, each panel also plots the mean perception of party chairs in the survey, along with 95% confidence intervals. Panels are broken up by the chairs' parties and whether responding "yes" to the issue item reflects a conservative or liberal issue position. For liberal issues, mean perceptions are lower than mean public support, meaning chairs underestimate how liberal the public is. For conservative issue, perceptions are higher than mean support, showing that chairs overestimate support for conservative positions.

Table 3: Comparing Party Leaders' *Perceptions* of County Public Opinion to Actual Public Opinion

Issue (see Table 2 for item wording)	Democratic Chairs				Republican Chairs			
	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	**Average Misperception**	N CCES Resp-ondents	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	**Average Misperception**	N CCES Resp-ondents
Liberal Policies								
Abortion always legal	44.1	45.6	-1.60	2,620	30.1	40.8	-10.70*	1,906
	(2.449)	(2.914)	(3.388)		(1.780)	(4.189)	(4.377)	
Amnesty for undocumented immigrants	40.7	38.5	2.13	2,418	28.2	38.3	-10.11**	1,624
	(2.340)	(3.136)	(4.208)		(2.357)	(3.633)	(3.507)	
Same-sex marriage	38.6	46.2	-7.52*	2,382	26.6	37.4	-10.78*	2,544
	(2.470)	(3.398)	(3.314)		(2.335)	(3.611)	(4.183)	
Conservative Policies								
Abortion always illegal	45.0	19.4	25.63***	2,567	53.8	15.8	37.93***	2,737
	(2.622)	(3.256)	(4.249)		(2.552)	(2.350)	(3.571)	
Birth control religious exemptions	48.1	39.2	8.96*	2,193	64.9	38.7	26.14***	2,790
	(2.551)	(3.746)	(3.965)		(2.815)	(3.460)	(5.245)	
Weaken gun control laws	51.8	18.8	32.97***	2,987	67.1	12.8	54.29***	1,749
	(2.846)	(2.692)	(3.810)		(3.201)	(2.504)	(3.775)	

Note: *** = $p < 0.001$. ** = $p < 0.01$. * = $p < 0.05$. *Standard errors are clustered at the county level. For each issue, the table reports mean support in the county of a chair chosen at random according to the weighting procedure outlined in Appendix Section C (Actual Public Opinion), the mean perception of chairs surveyed (Elite Perception), the difference of these two quantities (Average Misperception) and the number of CCES respondents that the weighted estimates are based on. Columns to the left reflect responses from Democratic party chairs and CCES respondents in the counties represented by those chairs; right-hand columns do the same for Republican chairs and their counties. Liberal policies are ones for which answering "Yes" to the survey question reflects a liberal position, thus, negative values for average misperceptions on these issues reflect underestimating the public's support for liberal policies. The opposite is true for the conservative policies.*

marriage in 2013,[30] but the typical Republican county party leader perceived county support at 27%. Democrats do not consistently overestimate voter liberalism, and indeed if anything appear to overestimate voter conservatism as well.

Figure 3b and Table 4 report the results for party leaders' estimates of state opinion. The results are similar: Republicans overestimate state support for conservative policies and underestimate state support for liberal policies.

These results are robust when we limit the estimates of true public opinion to opinion among voters only; voter mean opinion is typically within 1 percentage point of overall mean opinion reported in Table 2, with the largest difference being a 3 percentage point difference on the religious exemption issue. This difference is nearly an order of magnitude smaller than the magnitude of their average misperceptions; our results are *not* a result of elites thinking only about voters and not all residents.

Perceptions of state-level opinion: MRP

As a robustness check, we also used multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP) to estimate true public opinion in each state and compared these state-level MRP estimates to party leaders' perceptions their state.[31] MRP uses individual-level survey data and demographic information about the districts from the US Census to construct state-level estimates of support for each issue (Lax and Phillips 2009*b*; Warshaw and Rodden 2012; Park, Gelman and Bafumi 2004). Our MRP procedure first fits multilevel models to the responses to each issue question from the 2012 CCES. Each model returns estimated effects for demographic and geographic predictors. We then use the estimates from the multilevel model to estimate support for various demographic cells, identified by age, race, education, gender and state. Finally, using data from the US Census' American Community Survey, we weight those cells by their frequency in each state. The result is an estimate of the percent of each state supporting each issue. We then dyadically compare these es-

[30]Because smaller counties are more conservative but we weight all counties equally, the mean county opinion is more conservative than mean national opinion reported in Table 2. Again, the results are essentially unchanged when we weight mass public respondents equally instead of counties equally.

[31]MRP estimates at the county level would be more imprecise, so we focus on the state level where our estimates are most defensible.

Table 4: Comparing Party Leaders' *Perceptions* of State-wide Public Opinion to Actual Public Opinion

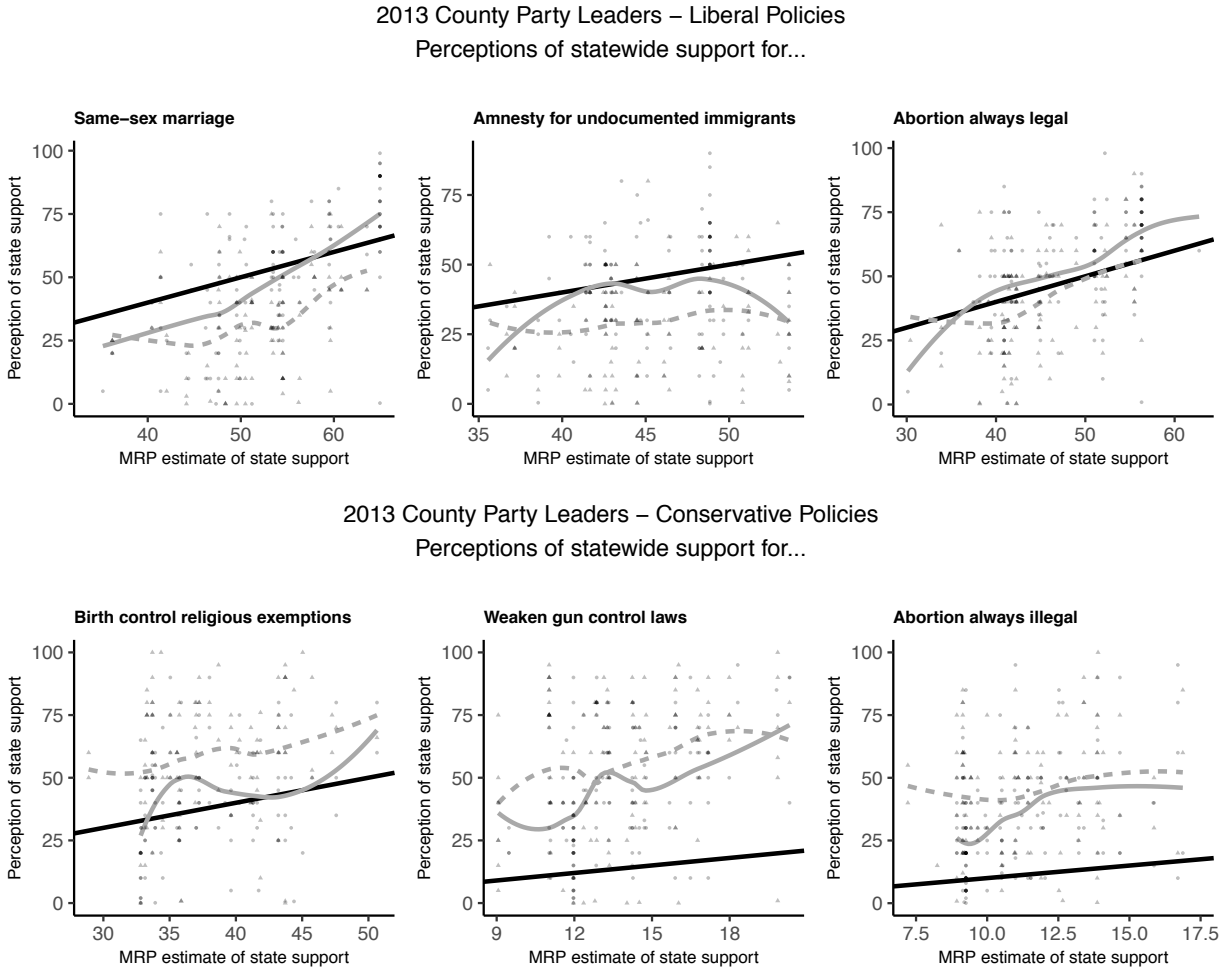
Issue (see Table 2 for item wording)	Democratic Chairs				Republican Chairs			
	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	**Average Misperception**	N CCES Resp-ondents	Elite Perception	Actual Public Opinion	**Average Misperception**	N CCES Resp-ondents
Liberal Policies								
Abortion always legal	49.1	45.7	3.47*	14,508	40.6	44.9	-4.32**	17,692
	(2.080)	(1.643)	(1.668)		(2.005)	(1.459)	(1.318)	
Amnesty for undocumented immigrants	37.8	44.3	-6.56**	13,414	31.9	45.5	-13.69***	13,916
	(1.764)	(0.977)	(2.239)		(1.775)	(1.082)	(1.889)	
Same-sex marriage	46.0	51.2	-5.17**	15,476	32.5	49.4	-16.96***	13,058
	(2.820)	(1.454)	(1.834)		(2.909)	(1.185)	(2.346)	
Conservative Policies								
Abortion always illegal	37.8	12.7	25.07***	16,167	48.8	12.7	36.13***	14,015
	(2.074)	(0.626)	(2.019)		(1.827)	(0.859)	(2.015)	
Birth control religious exemptions	44.0	39.3	4.70*	14,567	61.6	37.7	23.97***	14,949
	(2.198)	(0.856)	(2.072)		(2.015)	(0.768)	(1.674)	
Weaken gun control laws	49.0	14.4	34.57***	13,654	59.3	14.0	45.25***	13,130
	(2.978)	(0.602)	(2.992)		(3.287)	(0.611)	(3.036)	

Note: *** = $p < 0.001$. ** = $p < 0.01$. * = $p < 0.05$. *Standard errors are clustered at the state level. For each issue, the table reports mean support in the state of a chair chosen at random according to the weighting procedure outlined in Appendix Section C (Actual Public Opinion), the mean perception of chairs surveyed (Elite Perception), the difference of these two quantities (Average Misperception) and the number of CCES respondents that the weighted estimates are based on. Columns to the left reflect responses from Democratic party chairs and CCES respondents in the states represented by those chairs; right-hand columns do the same for Republican chairs and their states. Liberal policies are ones for which answering "Yes" to the survey question reflects a liberal position, thus, negative values for average misperceptions on these issues reflect underestimating the public's support for liberal policies. The opposite is true for the conservative policies.*

timates to party leaders' perceptions. For states with sufficiently large samples, MRP is designed so that the results approach rely very little on MRP's demographic weighting. Online Appendix D provides further details.

We present the MRP results graphically in Figure 4. The x-axis on each graph shows the MRP estimate of state support and the y-axis shows party leaders' estimate of state support. If party leaders were perfectly accurate, we would expect their responses to follow the black line, which shows the line $y = x$. However, the results from the MRP estimates match what we saw in the weighted raw data: Republican party leaders consistently overestimate support for conservative policy positions, whereas Democrats do not do the same with liberal policy positions.

Figure 4: Comparing Party Chairs' *Perceptions* of State Opinion to MRP Estimates of State Opinion



Notes: Democratic chairs' estimates are in solid lines; Republican chairs' estimates are shown in dashed lines. The x-axis on each graph shows the MRP estimate of state support and the y-axis shows party leaders' estimate of state support. The black line, which shows the line $y = x$. Each dot represents one chair's estimates. The lines show loess smoothed local averages. Liberal policies are ones for which answering "Yes" to the survey question reflects taking a liberal position, the opposite is true for conservative policies.

These MRP results help alleviate three possible concerns about the findings from the weighted raw data. First, one possible concern with the raw data is that innumeracy leads party leaders to

simply answer by default near 50% or some other threshold. However, Figure 4 shows that most party chairs do not answer at any particular threshold, and that there is a clear correlation between the truth and their answers—albeit offset by a large intercept shift in the case of Republicans, due to their overestimation of state conservatism. Second, one might worry that party chairs are simply loathe to admit their party's "side" is not favored by a majority. However, it is clear from Figure 4 that Republican party chairs still overestimate conservatism even when their side is favored; for example, in states where same-sex marriage does not receive majority support in the public, Republican party chairs still estimate its support to be much lower than it already is. Finally, one might worry that the results are driven by Republicans in one particular kind of state, such as the majority of states that lean rightward. However, Figure 4 makes clear that the misperceptions are consistent across states.

Discussion of Finding 2

These results help reinforce the findings from our conjoint experiment (Finding 1). Our conjoint experiment found that Democratic chairs were more likely to prefer nominating a centrist candidate and less likely to prefer nominating an extreme candidate than their Republican counterparts. The conjoint experiment's further results found that this may be due to the fact that Democrats and Republicans *both* see more conservative candidates as more electable than more liberal candidates. This pushes Democrats to be more enthusiastic about nominating centrists (who are more conservative than typical Democrats) and Republicans to be more enthusiastic about nominating extremists (who are more conservative than typical Republicans). Our findings in this section about how party leaders perceive public opinion represent methodologically distinct evidence consistent with the finding from the conjoint experiment. Both Democratic and Republican chairs perceive a general public that is more conservative than the survey evidence suggests. Moreover, Republicans overestimate the public's conservatism especially dramatically.

Importantly, these differing perceptions suggest that on many issues where political scientists would expect extremely conservative candidates to take positions out-of-step with public opinion,

Republican leaders appear more likely to expect such candidates would be in-step. These differing perceptions are squarely in line with the finding that Republican local party leaders expect very conservative candidates to perform better in general elections than political science conventional wisdom predicts.[32]

Two caveats should be noted. First, it is always possible that other phenomena explain these inequalities, e.g., party leaders rationalizing their own more conservative views by projecting them onto the public. Second, our data do not allow us to test whether the *individual* party leaders who choose more extreme candidates are also more likely to misperceive their constituents. In the conjoint experiment (Finding 1), each party chair was shown just one pair of candidates at random, and when asked to perceive public opinion (for Finding 2), party chairs were also shown just a few opinion questions at random, which leaves us with too few cases on any one question to reliably determine whether party chairs who prefer extremists misperceive public opinion. Future research might ask party leaders to evaluate more pairs of hypothetical candidates or answer more questions about their perceptions of public opinion, but as a first cut at this topic, we opted to keep our survey as brief as possible. As a result, we cannot say whether *individual* party chairs who prefer extremists also misperceive their constituents, but rather, that party chairs *as a group* both prefer extremists to centrists—especially Republican chairs—and tend to perceive their constituents as more conservative than they really are.

With this said, both of our first two studies relied on explicitly prompting party chairs for their beliefs about the electorate's ideological composition. Our next piece of evidence revisits Finding 1—that party chairs prefer extreme candidates over centrists in a conjoint—and asks whether local party chairs spontaneously think of centrism or moderation as a desirable quantity when ideology and issues are not explicitly primed.

[32]Our analysis does not assume that median voter opinion represents the position politicians are most incentives to take; for example, on the issue of gun control, it is possible that differences in intensity on each side of the issue mean that siding with the minority of those opposed to gun control is more politically advantageous. Clearly, public opinion as measured in polls may not be the only form of public opinion that party leaders are thinking about when they gauge what candidates the public is likely to favor. However, intensity-weighted opinion is difficult to measure objectively, and our other two studies are better suited to capture chairs' summary judgments about the public's behavior in elections. Our question wording therefore specifically asked what percentage of people living in their state or county agree with the survey questions that appeared on the CCES, as this baseline was objectively estimable.

Finding 3: When Describing Ideal Candidates, Chairs Rarely Mention Centrism or Moderation

To provide another robustness check on our findings that local party leaders are not pushing their parties to nominate more centrist candidates, on the paper version of the survey,[33] we asked party leaders an open-ended question: "In an ideal world, what personal qualities would you like all of your party's political candidates to have? Please list as many as you would like."[34] If local party leaders really prefer more centrist candidates in an effort to win general elections we expected them to say so. If, on the other hand, they consciously prefer more polarized candidates, candidate ideology should be a "top of mind" consideration. That is, if our theory is right, local party leaders' preference for ideologically extreme candidates shouldn't just be evident in what they do in experiments; it should also manifest in what they say in response to direct questions.

Of the 232 party leaders who completed paper copies of the survey with the conjoint, 84% listed at least one characteristic in response to our question about ideal candidates.[35] After research assistants blind to the hypotheses of the study grouped these responses into 36 categories,[36] the data revealed two patterns consistent with our argument. First, only about 9% of local party leaders name centrism or moderation as ideal qualities. Moderation is not irrelevant—some subset of party leaders name it as important—but nine out of ten party leaders do not mention centrism when we ask them to think of their ideal candidates.

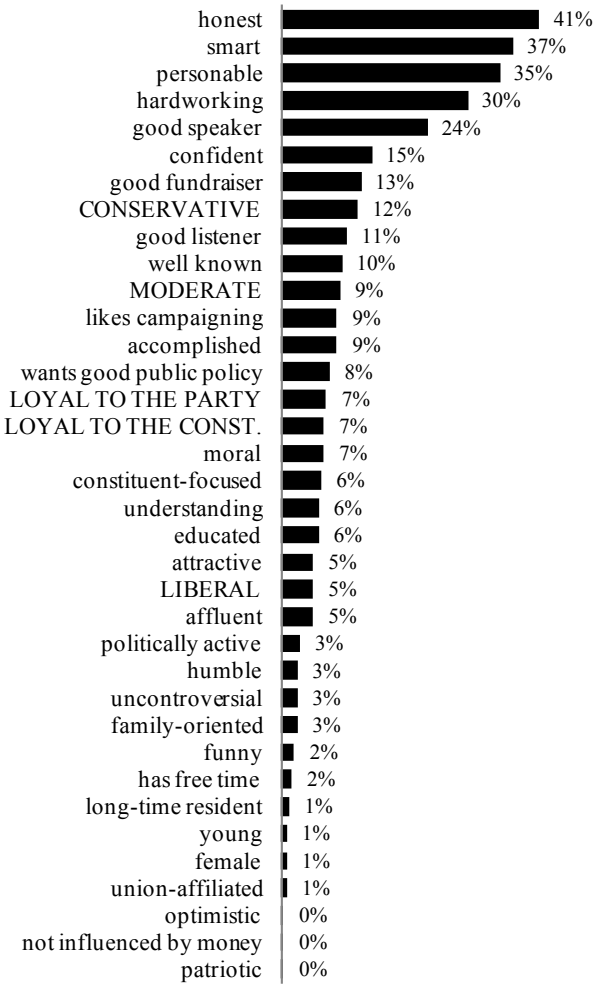
[33] Due to a programming error, the question did not appear in the online version of the survey.

[34] This question appeared on the survey directly after the conjoint experiment described in Finding 1. This placement means the conjoint's results should not be contaminated by chairs wanting to fill out the conjoint with their answers to this open-ended question in mind. Moreover, the conjoint presented hypothetical candidates with many traits besides ideology, so the presence of the conjoint before this open-ended question should not have primed ideology. The question stem, by referring to "all of your party's candidates," encouraged chairs to think not just about primaries but about general elections as well.

[35] These 232 party leaders—and the subset who responded to our open-ended question—were again broadly representative of the sampling frame (see Online Appendix B.2). Although a larger sample would of course be preferable, the responses party leaders gave to this simple item were illuminating—and generally consistent with their behavior in the conjoint experiment.

[36] A trained undergraduate research assistant first read through each open-ended response, creating new categories as she encountered new kinds of responses. Using her list of categories, a second research assistant then independently coded each open-ended response. The two sets of coded responses were compared, and in the rare instances when the two research assistants disagreed, one of the study's Principal Investigators resolved the disagreement.

Figure 5: Percentage of Party Chairs who Mentioned Various Traits in Response to an Open-Ended Question about the "Ideal" Candidate



Notes: Each bar represents the percent of candidates who volunteered each response to an open-ended question about ideal candidate traits. Traits listed in all capitals are partisan or ideological qualities.

Far more, however, name some variant on the concept of ideological or party loyalty. Figure 5 plots the frequency of each type response category that our research assistants identified. Research assistants identified four separate characteristics related to ideological loyalty (printed in all caps in the figure): conservative, liberal, loyal to the party, and loyal to the Constitution. Individually,

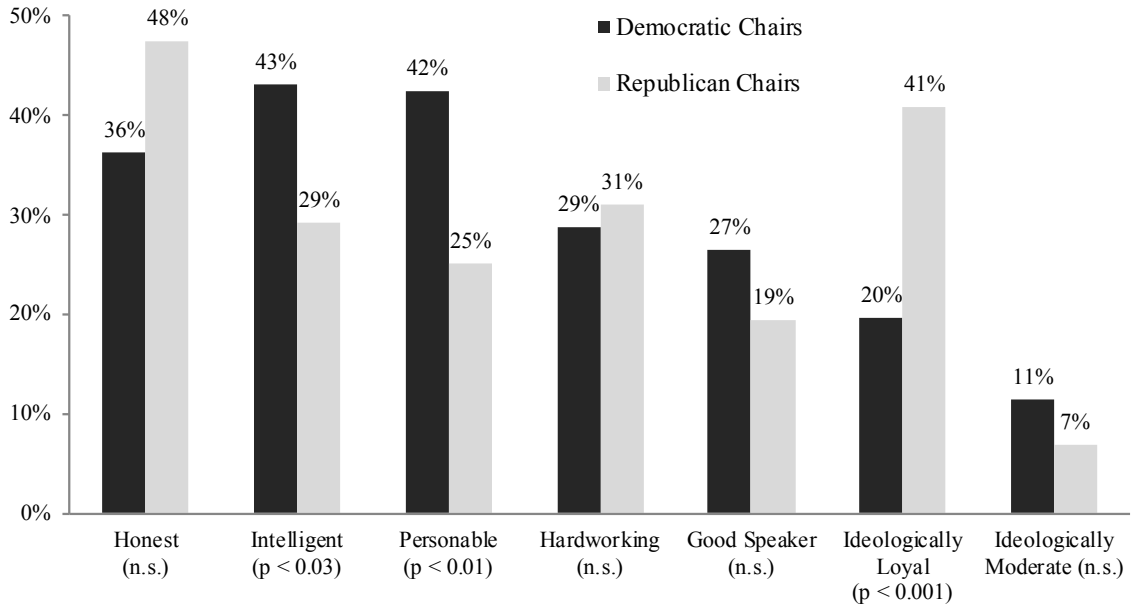
these traits each made up small percentages of responses, like moderation. Considered together, however—that is, assuming that these four categories are essentially different ways of expressing something like "ideological loyalty to my party"—these traits made up a strikingly large percentage of responses. Fully 29% of party leaders mentioned one or more of these partisan ideologies as an ideal candidate trait, more than three times the number who mentioned ideological moderation or centrism (difference in proportions $p < 0.001$).[37]

Second, Republican elites mentioned ideological loyalty far more than Democratic elites. Figure 6 plots the percentage of leaders in each party who mentioned each of the five most common traits as well as the percentage who mentioned any of the ideological responses we identified. Republican party chairs were twice as likely as Democrats to mention ideology ($p < 0.001$)—the largest inter-party difference by far. Table OA1 shows that this difference remains the same size when controlling for 2012 Obama vote share; the results are not driven by the presence of Republicans in disproportionately conservative counties. Figure OA1 in the Online Appendix replicates the raw data in Figure 5, dividing the sample by party; we find that Republicans mention just the single category of "conservative" four times as often as "moderate" (29% of the time versus only 7% of the time).

These findings mirror other findings that Republican elites place a special premium on ideological loyalty (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016)—but are at odds with any hopes that local Republican local party leaders might seek out centrist candidates in order to win elections. Indeed, while chairs of both parties were more likely to spontaneously mention ideological orthodoxy as a desirable quality than moderation or centrism, this differed by party—Democrats were twice as likely to spontaneously mention liberalism than centrism or moderation as desirable, but Republicans were nearly six times as likely to mention conservatism than centrism or moderation.

[37]Even when we grouped "wants good public policy" along with "moderate" into a larger category that might be thought of as "non-extreme preferences," party leaders were still almost twice as likely to mention ideological orthodoxy [29%] relative to this larger "non-extreme preferences" category [16%]. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this robustness check.

Figure 6: Republican and Democratic Chairs Were More Likely to Mention Ideological Loyalty than Moderation



Notes: Percentage values correspond to the share of open-ended responses that mentioned each quality. p-values correspond to difference of means tests between how often chairs of each party mention the quality. The within-party differences in mentioning loyalty vs. moderation were also statistically significant.

In summary, our results are again inconsistent with the idea that local party chairs seek out centrist candidates. These findings should be regarded as more tentative because of the smaller sample size and the open-ended nature of the question. However, it is encouraging that a different methodological approach suggests a finding consistent with Finding 1 from the conjoint: centrism and moderation rarely appear to come to the top of party leaders' minds when they think about their ideal nominees.

Discussion: Having Their Cake And Eating It, Too

As elite polarization has continued to grow at all levels of government in the United States, scholars and political scientists have begun to ask what reforms might reduce it. Recently, scholars

have considered one intriguing possibility: that reforms empowering formal political party leaders might actually reduce polarization, as party leaders might be more likely to favor nominating centrists in hopes their parties will perform better in general elections. Evidence has accumulated about the typically moderate candidate preferences of national and state party leaders in primaries (e.g., La Raja and Schaffner 2015; Hassell 2018; Persily 2015). However, many potential reforms to empower national and state party leaders would also further increase the power of *local* party leaders—a group already influential in many primary elections at all levels of government yet about whom we know little.

In this paper, we reconsider common assumptions about party leaders' perceptions of the electorate, arguing that local party leaders might not see strong incentives to nominate centrist candidates and therefore might not prefer to nominate them. We considered several reasons why this may be the case. For example, local party leaders may be especially likely to be surrounded by like-minded and polarized individuals, such as the bevy of grassroots organizations—especially on the political right—that have attempted to use well-organized and high-visibility events to press their demands on political leaders (e.g., Skocpol and Williamson 2011). Many local party leaders and their organizations do not have the same resources, professionalization, and breadth of experience that their state and national counterparts have, making them more susceptible to overgeneralizing from the opinions of copartisans and activists when thinking about the general electorate.

In a series of original studies, we collected considerable evidence consistent with our expectations about local party leaders' preferences and perceptions. Our results suggested that Republican local party leaders are especially unlikely to favor nominating centrists. This appears to be because Republican county party leaders actually see extreme conservatives as *more* electable than centrists. In this way, Republican party leaders appear to believe that nominating extremists allows them to 'have their cake and eat it, too'—winning more votes in general elections by offering voters the opportunity to select party loyalists. Their Democratic counterparts see centrists as only slightly more electable than extremists and so still do not favor nominating them on balance. It may well be the case that the formal leaders of local parties are less enthusiastic about typical partisan

candidates and extremists than other local party activists like donors and interest group leaders. But our evidence shows many local party leaders remain enthusiastic about non-centrists still—appearing not to believe nominating centrists will help their parties win. Even if local party leaders face a trade-off between nominating electable centrists and less-electable loyalists in reality, many of them do not perceive one.

Of course, our studies have several limitations, and we would welcome future research that addressed them. First, our studies use survey data and hypothetical candidate experiments, not data on how local party leaders actually behave or the choices they make when the stakes are real. It could always be the case that party leaders are less willing to take a chance on an extreme candidate in surveys and a hypothetical decision than they would be in real life. Although our survey-based approach allowed us to conduct experiments with a high degree of internal validity and better capture key theoretical mechanisms, observational data on how local party leaders actually recruit candidates would clearly complement our approach.[38]

A second area where future research could build on our own is to better understand why party leaders have the perceptions of the electorate that they do. We established a new empirical finding about local party leaders (their preferences in primaries) and a likely contributing mechanism (their perceptions of the electorates' preferences), but the mechanism for this mechanism (why party leaders maintain these perceptions) is less clear. Although we had several reasons to expect Republican party leaders to overestimate the electorate's conservatism, more research is needed to understand how important each of these are. For example, it could be instructive to understand how party chairs' misperceptions of public opinion vary according to their experiences both prior to becoming chair and once in office.[39] Consistent with one reason we expected Republicans to maintain such beliefs, however, we did find that Republicans thought that extreme candidates would be more

[38]That said, it is unlikely that simple social desirability bias is responsible for our findings, as it is unclear why this would produce the partisan difference we found. Furthermore, our conjoint experiment (Finding 1) was designed to randomly give party leaders so many characteristics of candidates it seems unlikely leaders would systematically offer a socially desirable response regarding one particular characteristic. It is also unclear why party leaders seeking to give socially desirable answers would spontaneously mention centrism or moderation so rarely (in Finding 3).

[39]We attempted to ask about party chairs' experience prior to attaining their chairships with an open ended question on our survey, but unfortunately chairs' responses proved too vague to yield any useful categorization.

likely to secure support from activists, being better able to recruit volunteers and raise money than centrists.

Third, our research took as its starting point prior studies that suggest that national and state party leaders prefer nominating centrists, but our data did not allow us to directly compare county-level party chairs to national and state party chairs using a common survey instrument. We hope that future research will be able to do so.

Fourth, our research suggests that party leaders are more likely to prefer nominating extremists and that they are more likely to view voters are ideologically conservative (leading Republicans to strongly favor extremists and Democrats to temper their preferences for extremists out of concerns about electability), but our data do not allow us to directly ascertain whether *individual* leaders who prefer extreme candidates are more likely to misperceive public opinion. We hope that this point will be taken up in future research.

Relatedly, our data do not allow us to test an intriguing possibility, namely, that Democrats' misperceptions of public opinion may offset their preference for ideologically extreme candidates– that is, the "extremist" candidates who Democrats prefer may in fact be moderate relative to actual public opinion. Because the conjoint experiment (Finding 1) asked party chairs about candidates who were more or less extreme than the typical co-partisan and our public opinion perception items (Finding 2) asked party chairs about the views of the typical voter, we cannot be sure, but we hope that future research will use some common scale when asking party leaders about the kinds of candidates they support and their perceptions of public opinion.

Finally, our evidence comes from only one point in time, and future research could help understand whether our findings are time-bound. For example, our theory would predict that if liberal grassroots groups became as active and organized in pressuring local party organizations as conservative grassroots groups have been, party chairs' perceptions of their incentives might shift. It is too soon to tell whether groups like Indivisible that have sprung up in reaction to Donald Trump's election will succeed to the extent conservative groups have, but future studies that track this activity and measure party chair's perceptions again could prove informative about mechanisms. Our

work can serve as a point of comparison for any such future research that will allow it to uncover any such changes over time.

Our findings also suggest two intriguing possibilities with regard to the literature on asymmetric polarization (e.g., Mann and Ornstein 2013). First, our findings that Democratic party leaders seem less sanguine about extremists' electoral prospects than Republicans suggest a new mechanism that may underpin asymmetric polarization at the local, state, and national levels. Since Republican local party leaders believe they can 'have their cake and eat it, too' when considering potential nominees, they appear to advocate nominating extremists—which may contribute to the rightward movement of Republican nominees. In addition, our data also suggest an intriguing potential strategy for reducing polarization: consistent with recent field experiments (Butler and Nickerson 2011), supplying local party leaders with more reliable information about public opinion and their incentives might change their perceptions and reduce their support for extremists. If local party leaders came to believe they were undermining their party's electoral prospects, they might be less likely to favor nominating extremists than they appear today. This hypothesis is ripe for future research. Most broadly, our results underscore the importance of not taking the incentives political actors perceive for granted; just as scholars of public opinion theorize about and study how voters subjectively perceive the political world, scholars of elite decisionmaking should seek to carefully understand not just the strategic realities political elites face, but also how they perceive them (e.g., Bowler, Donovan and Karp 2006; Broockman and Skovron 2018; Miler 2009).

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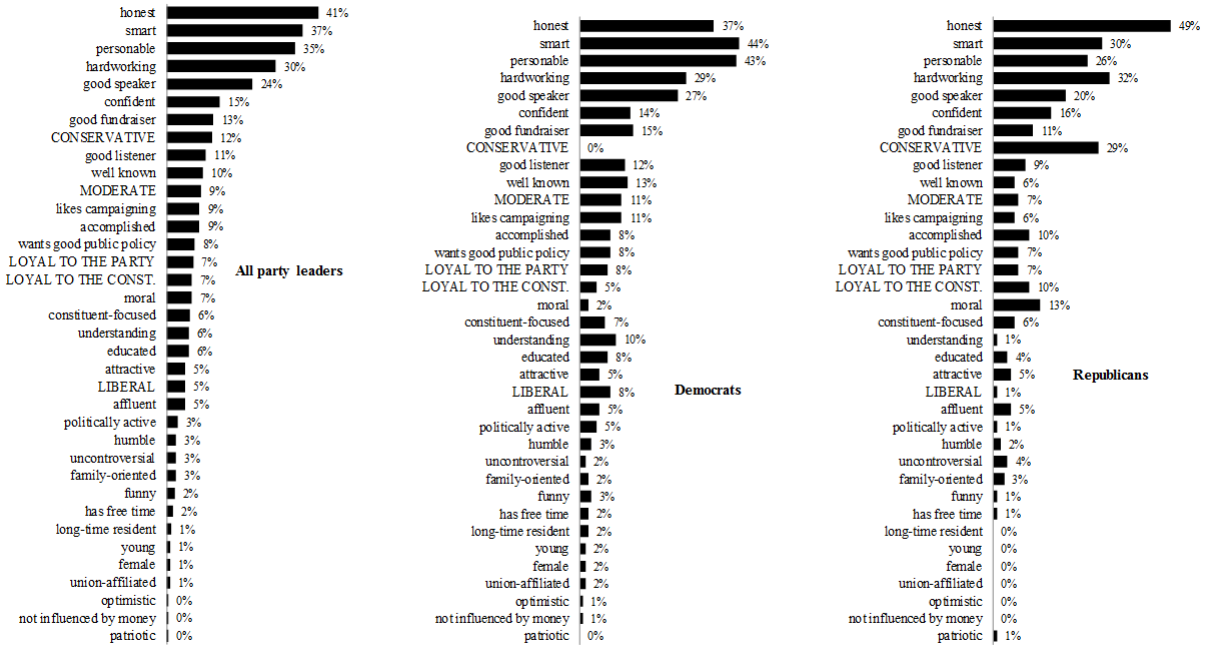
Online Appendix

A Figures and Tables

Due to space constraints, we place several Figures and Tables referenced in the manuscript in the Online Appendix.

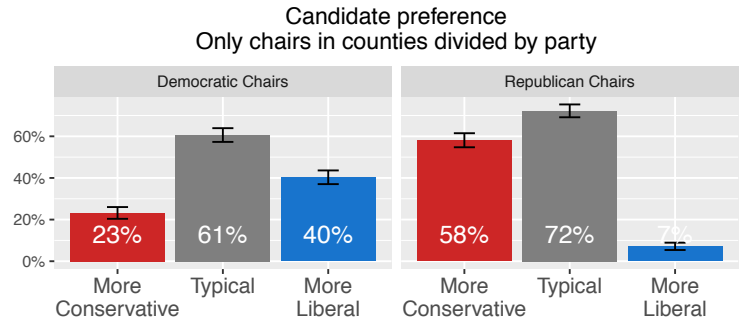
Figure OA1: Figure 5, Open-Ended Responses, Divided by Party



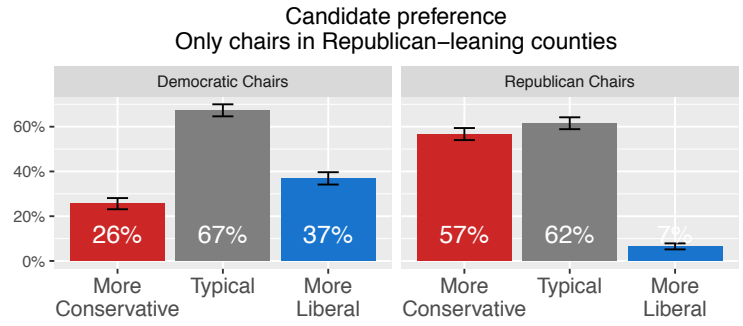
Note: This figure repeats Figure 5 (reproduced at left) for Democratic and Republican party chairs, plotting the percent of each party who gave a response falling into each category to an open-ended question about the ideal traits for candidates to have.

Figure OA2: Party Leaders' Preferences In Primaries: Generalizability across partisan contexts

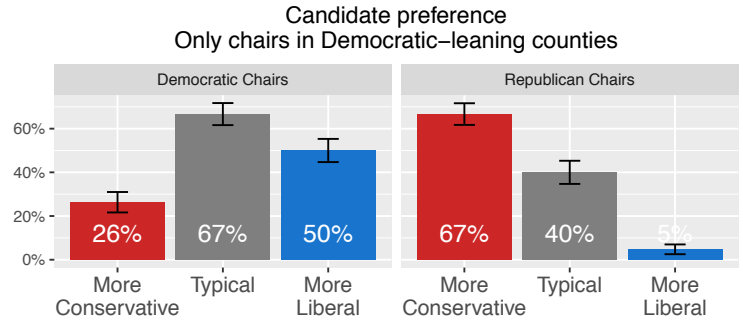
(a) Objectively competitive counties



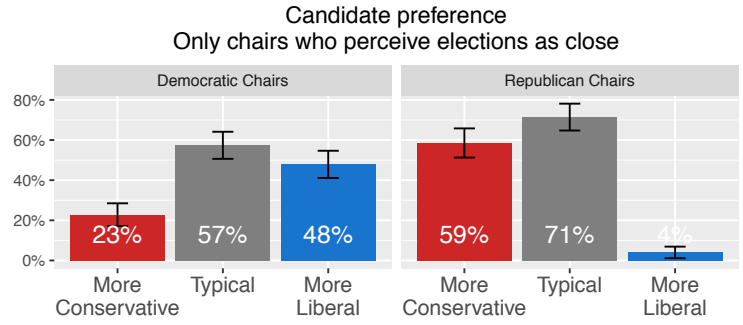
(b) Republican-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share $< 40\%$)



(c) Democratic-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share $> 60\%$)



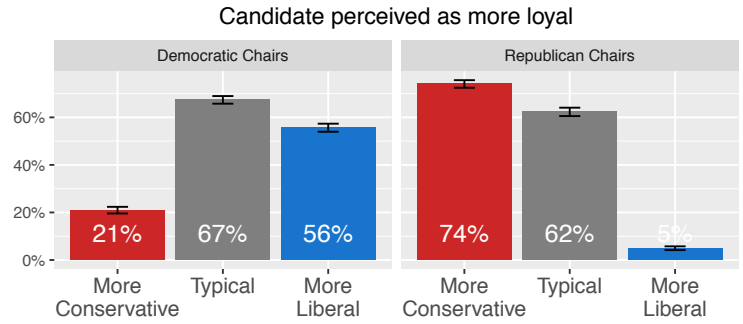
(d) Subjectively competitive counties



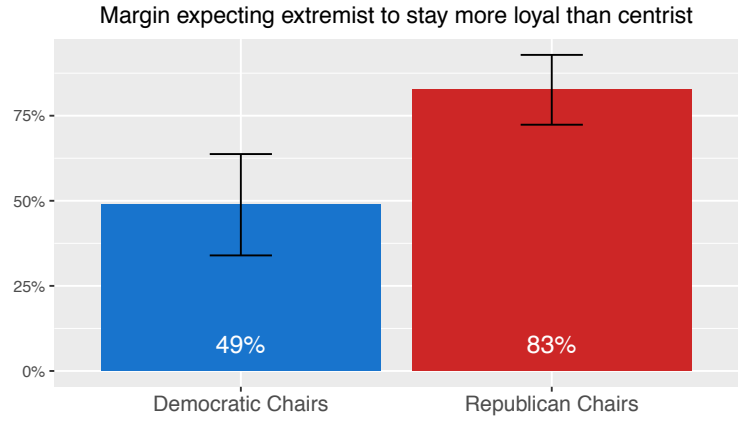
Note: This figure repeats the analysis in Figure 2 in the main text, dividing counties by their partisan leanings. Objectively competitive counties (Panel (a)) are those in which Obama won between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in the 2012 presidential election. Panel (b) repeats the analysis in only Republican- leaning counties where Obama received less than 40% of the two-party vote. Panel (c) repeats the analysis in counties where Obama won easily with greater than 60% of the vote. Panel (d) repeats the analysis in counties where chairs reported that they perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for their party's candidates.

Figure OA3: Party leaders expect extremists to toe the party line

(a) Objectively competitive counties



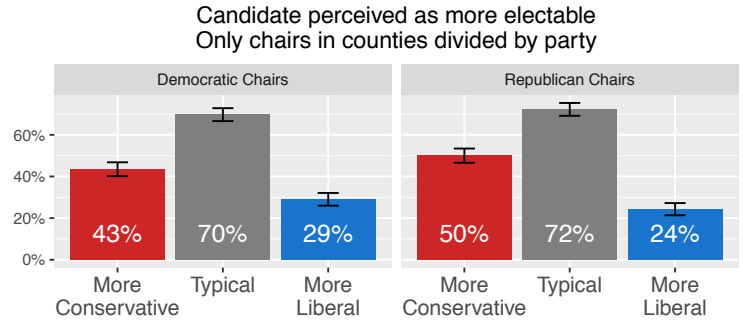
(b) Subjectively competitive counties



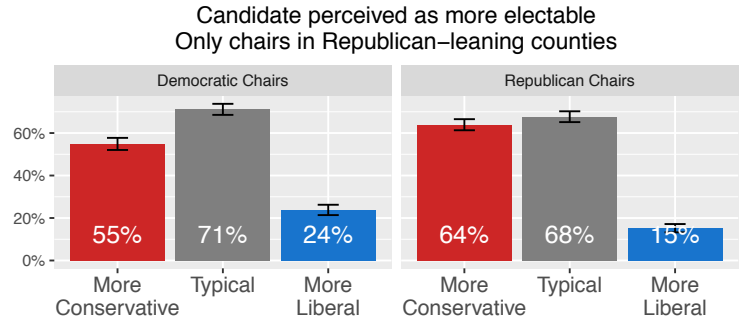
Note: This figure presents results for the conjoint experiment outcome, "Which candidate is more likely to stay loyal to the party?" Objectively competitive counties (Panel (a)) are those in which Obama won between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in the 2012 presidential election. Subjectively competitive counties (Panel (d)) are those where chairs reported that they perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for their party's candidates.

Figure OA4: Party Leaders' Expectations About Electability: Generalizability across partisan contexts

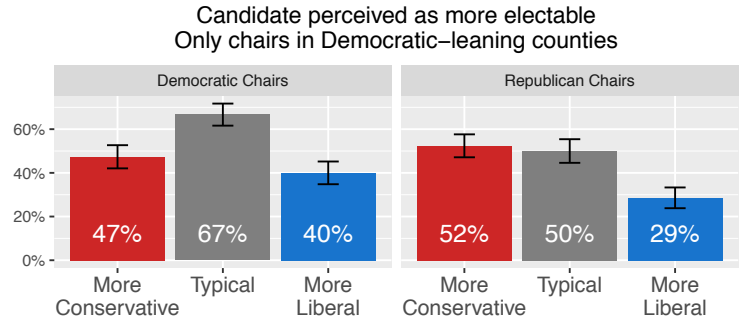
(a) Objectively competitive counties



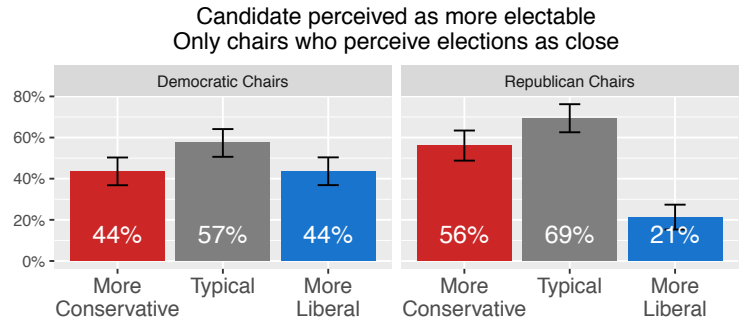
(b) Republican-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share $< 40\%$)



(c) Democratic-leaning counties (2012 Obama Vote Share $> 60\%$)



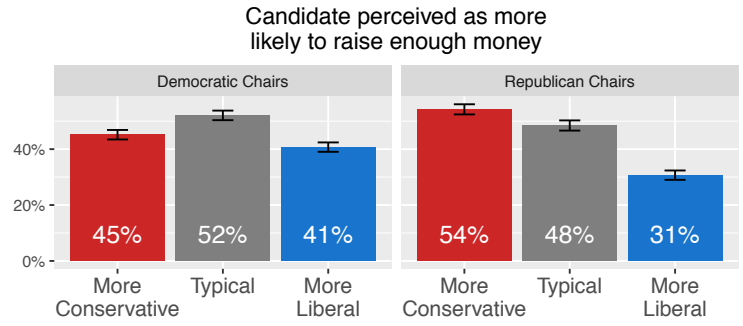
(d) Subjectively competitive counties



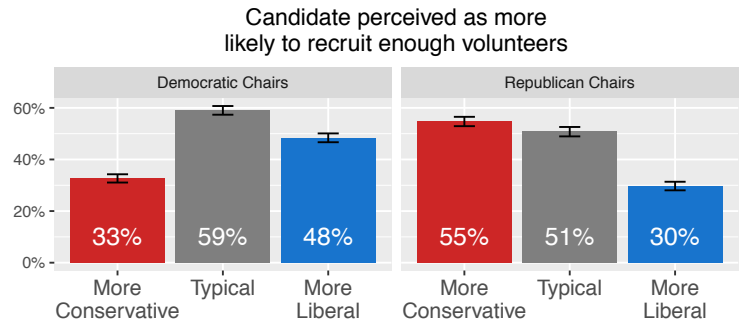
Note: This figure presents results for the conjoint experiment outcome, "Which candidate is more likely to win the general election?" Panel (a) reports results in counties where Obama won between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in the 2012 presidential election. Panel (b) repeats the analysis in only Republican- leaning counties where Obama received less than 40% of the two-party vote. Panel (c) repeats the analysis in counties where Obama won easily with greater than 60% of the vote. Panel (d) repeats the analysis in counties where chairs reported that they perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for their party's candidates.

Figure OA5: Party leaders expect extremists to be more successful raising money and recruiting volunteers

(a)



(b)



Note: This figure presents results for the conjoint experiment outcome, "Which candidate is more likely to raise enough money?" (Panel (a)) and the outcome "Which candidate is more likely to recruit enough volunteers? (Panel (b)).

Table OA1: Robustness of Partisan Difference in Finding 3 to Control for 2012 Obama Vote Share

	DV = Mentioned Ideological Loyalty
Republican Chair	0.256***
	(0.068)
2012 Obama Vote Share	-0.028
	(0.223)
Constant	0.168*
	(0.099)
Observations	175
R-squared	0.076

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Note: This table shows that, even controlling for presidential vote share in counties, Republican chairs are more likely to mention ideological loyalty as a desirable trait for candidates.

B Representativeness

This section provides information on how representative NSPL respondents are of the broader population of county party chairs using data from the sampling frame and from another survey of county party chairs.

B.1 Representativeness of Survey Respondents to Sampling Frame

As described in the main text, Figures OA6 and OA7 show the distribution of Obama's 2012 vote share and county population, respectively, among survey respondents and non-respondents. Note that these statistics are not available for the 20% of party chairs in our sampling frame from states whose parties are organized at a level other than county (see Footnote 12 in the main text).

Figure OA6: Obama 2012 County Vote Share Among Survey Respondents and Non-Respondents

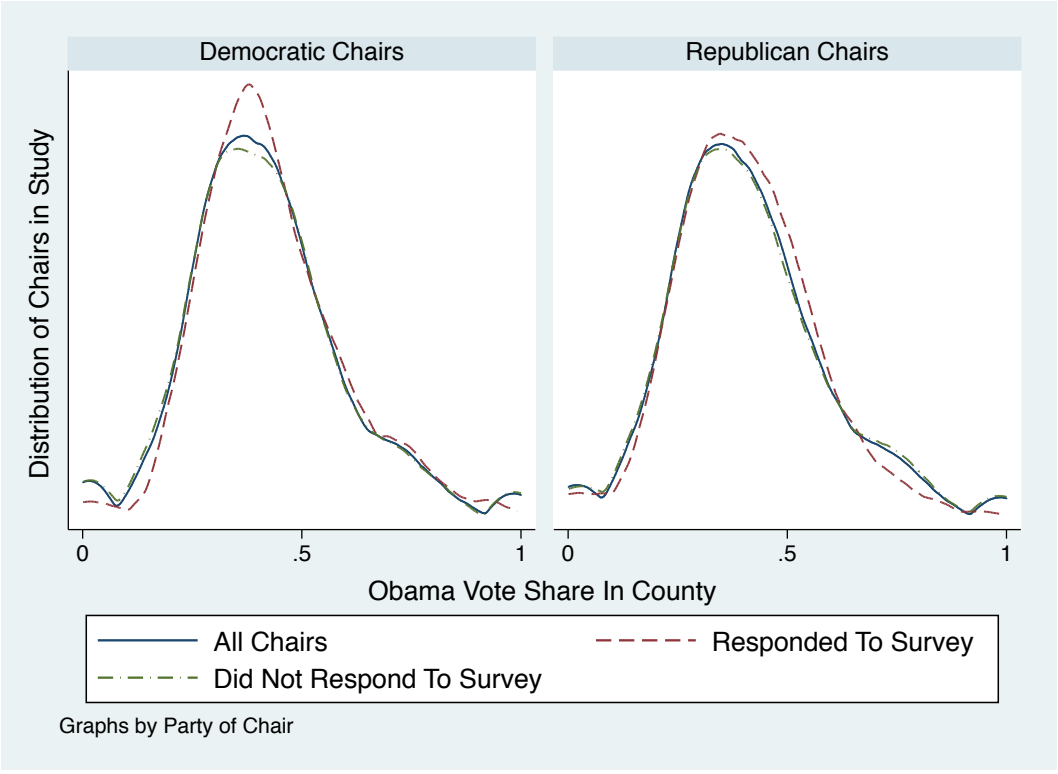


Figure OA7: County Population Among Respondents and Non-Respondents

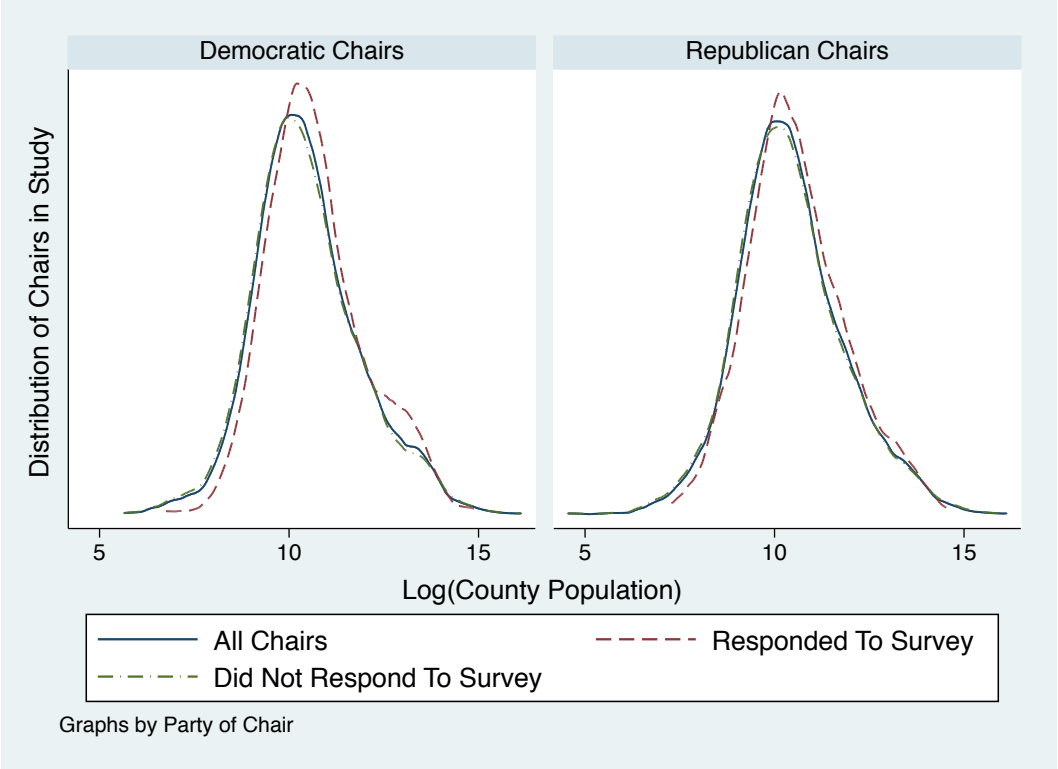


Table OA2: Comparisons of respondents to sampling frame.

Variable	p-value	t-test p-value
County population (log)	0.00	0.00
Obama vote share	0.76	0.74

Table OA3 reports linear regression models predicting whether party leaders responded to the survey as a function of covariates. The only significant coefficient is the finding that party leaders in larger counties were slightly more likely to respond. The first model in Table OA3 shows the results for all parties organized at the county level. As described in Footnote 12 in the main text, in 20% of cases, local political parties are not organized at the county level but instead at levels (e.g., townships, etc.) for which data on Obama vote share and population is not readily available. These parties are therefore missing from the first regression as there is missing data for those two covariates. The second regression contains all the local parties from whom we solicited a response.

We attempted to determine chair gender from first name, although in 20% of cases we were unable to do so conclusively. The omitted category for gender in the regression is this unknown category. The remaining 80% of chairs in the sampling frame were 33% female and 67% male. Chairs with known genders were slightly more likely to respond (by about 2 percentage points, although this is not statistically significant), but there was no difference between the response rates of male and female chairs.

Table OA3: Predictors of NSPL Survey Response

	Counties	All Parties
Female Chair	0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Male Chair	0.02	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Republican Chair	0.06	−0.00
	(0.08)	(0.01)
2012 Obama Vote Share	0.00	
	(0.04)	
log(county population)	0.02*	
	(0.01)	
2012 Obama Vote Share X	−0.07	
Republican Chair	(0.06)	
log(county population) X	−0.00	
Republican Chair	(0.01)	
(Intercept)	−0.04	0.17*
	(0.06)	(0.01)
N	4933	6217
R^2	0.01	0.00
F-statistic	3.554	0.6512
F-statistic p-value	0.001	0.58

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Note: This table shows predictors of responding to the NSPL from a linear probability model fit the entire sample frame. The first column reports the results for chairs whose parties are organized at the county level (where we have presidential vote share and population data available); the second column shows results for the entire sampling frame.

B.2 Representativeness of Respondents to Open Ended Question to Sampling Frame

Respondents to the open-ended item used in Finding 3 were similarly representative to non-respondents.

Figure OA8: Obama 2012 Two-Party Vote Share Among Open End Respondents and Non-Respondents

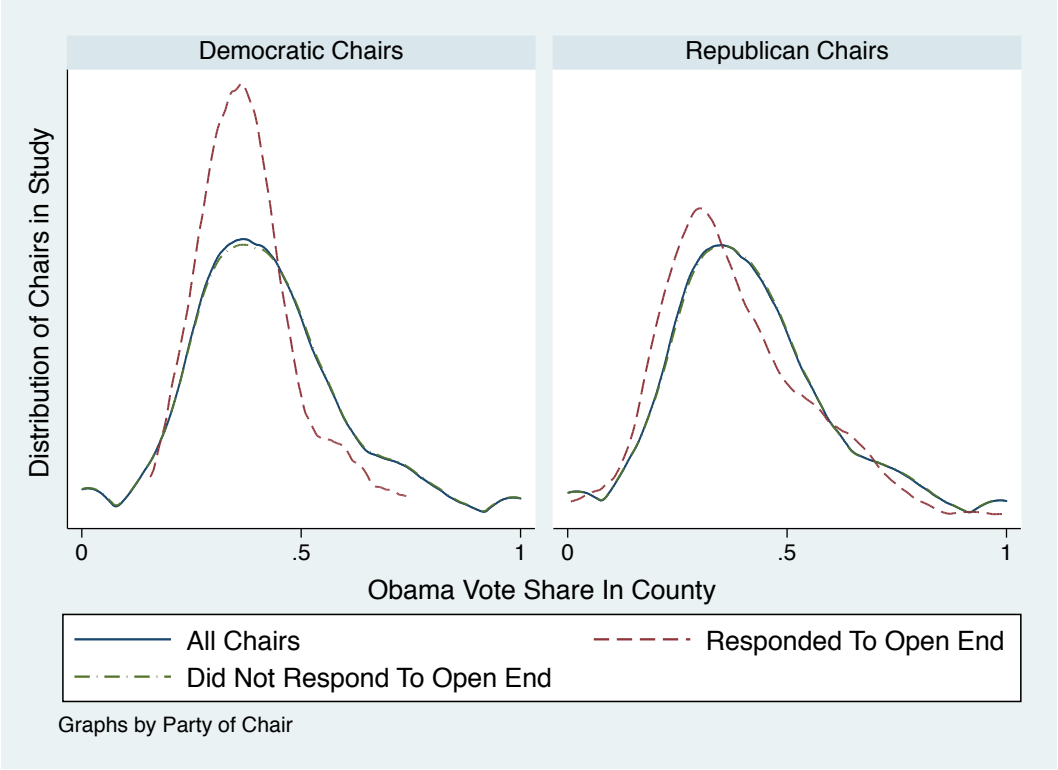
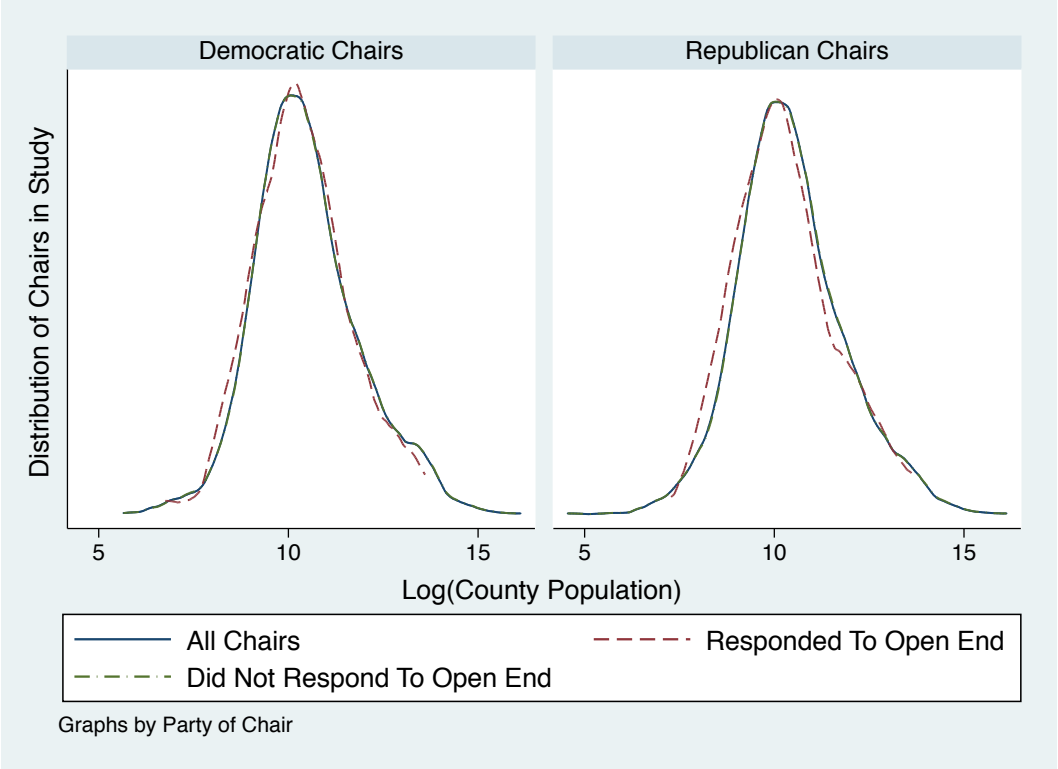


Figure OA9: County Population Among Open End Respondents and Non-Respondents



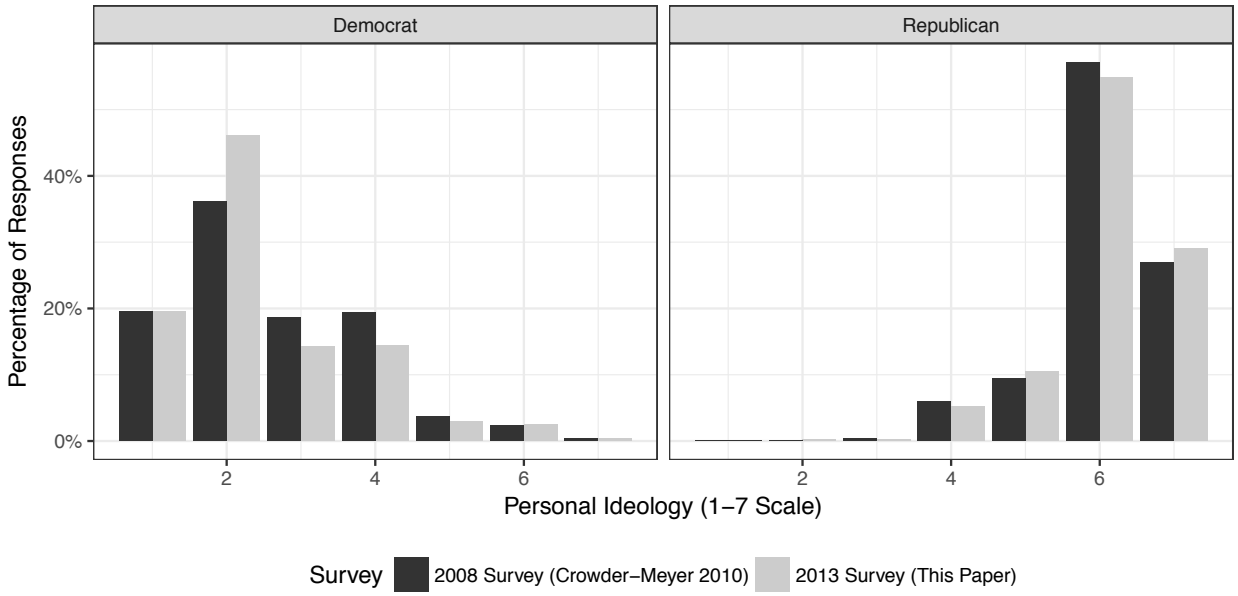
B.3 Comparison to 2008 party leaders survey: Ideology

As another point of comparison, we compare our 2013 survey data to a 2008 survey conducted by Crowder-Meyer (2010) that achieved a high response rate of 45.5%. For this survey, Crowder-Meyer conducted intensive individual follow-up contact with party chairs to encourage more responses. Although our survey response rate was relatively high, this very high response rate survey should be less subject to any potential selection issues and therefore serves as a useful point of comparison.

Figure OA10 plot the distributions of self-reported ideology for Democratic and Republican chairs in the two surveys. Reassuringly, the two samples have almost identical distributions of ideological identification. This suggests that, despite having a lower response rate, the respondents to our 2013 survey are unlikely to be biased in terms of their ideology compared to the population of party chairs. The only notable difference is that slightly more Democratic chairs placed themselves

at the "liberal" position than the "somewhat liberal" or "moderate" in 2013 than in 2008, but as our main result about Democrats is that they do not behave as extremely as Republicans, this should bias against our findings.

Figure OA10: Comparison of sample ideology in 2008 (black) and 2013 (grey) party leaders surveys. Higher values indicate more conservative ideology.



B.4 Professionalization of county party

As a final check of the representativeness of our sample, we evaluated the professionalization and financial resources of our respondents compared to the full sampling frame. We evaluated party professionalization using a strict standard – whether the county party spends money in federal races and a looser standard – whether the county party maintains a year-round physical office.

We evaluated the full set of committees registered with the FEC in 2013-14 using the Committee Master File, to identify all party committees (type X or Y) associated with a county party organization (137 total). We then compared these parties (which may be considered more professional by virtue of having filed with the FEC in order to spend funds in federal elections) to the list of parties that did or did not respond to our survey. 1.88% of our survey respondent parties have committees registered with the FEC, compared to 2.27% of parties that did not respond to our

survey. We also compared the proportion of parties responding to our survey who reported having a year round office (25.96%) with the proportion of parties reporting this same indicator of professionalism in Crowder-Meyer's 2008 survey of county parties (19.63%) with a 45.5% response rate. These small differences, one suggesting slightly less professionalism in our survey respondents (FEC filing), the other suggesting slightly more professionalism in our survey respondents (year round office) leads us to conclude that there is not a substantial bias toward more or less professionalized parties responding to our survey.

C Details of Raw Data Estimation Procedure for Party Leaders' Misperceptions of Public Opinion

Here we explain how we estimate party leaders' misperceptions of public opinion using the raw data despite lacking large county- or state-level samples.

Let C represent the set of all CCES respondents who live in counties where a party leader responded to the survey, with respondents indexed by c and issues by i. Denote opinions expressed on issue i by CCES respondent c as $o_{c,i}$. All the CCES questions we use are binary choice, such that $o_{c,i} \in \{0, 1\}$. Let $p_{c,i}$ represent the perception of the party leader in c's county of average support for issue i; that is, $p_{c,i}$ is a party leader's estimate of $E(o_{c,i})$ for their county. The average of $p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}$ within each county thus captures an estimate of party leaders' average overestimation of support for policy i. For example, suppose a party leader perceives support for a policy in their county at 80% but true support is only 60%. In this example, $E(p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}) = 0.8 - E(o_{c,i}) = 0.8 - 0.6 = 0.2$. Although the estimate for any given chair and county will be imprecise, we can estimate party leaders' *average* overestimation of support for i, by estimating the mean of $p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}$ across all the CCES respondents.[40] To incorporate the CCES weights, we take the weighted mean of this quantity, multiplying by the CCES survey weights w_c, which have mean 1. In addition, because the CCES has many more respondents from larger counties than smaller counties, we weight these estimates inversely to county size so that party leaders from large counties and small counties matter equally. In particular, we weight each CCES observation by $\frac{\bar{s_c}}{s_c}$, where s_c is the size of each CCES respondents' county in 2013 according to the US Census. This makes party leaders the effective unit of analysis and counts party leaders from small and large counties equally. Our results are similar when we weight to mass survey respondents instead of to counties, however.

We seek to estimate y_i, party leaders' average overestimation of county support for issue i. We therefore estimate y_i with:

[40] We acknowledge Doug Rivers for this suggestion.

$$\widehat{y_i} = \frac{\sum_{c \in C} \left[(p_{c,i} - o_{c,i}) w_c * \frac{\bar{s_c}}{s_c} \right]}{n(C)}, \tag{1}$$

where $n(C)$ is the number of CCES respondents.

We can also estimate public opinion in the average county—what party leaders' average perceptions would be if their perceptions were perfectly accurate—using:

$$\widehat{\overline{o_{c,i}}} = \frac{\sum_{c \in C} \left[o_{c,i} w_c * \frac{\bar{s_c}}{s_c} \right]}{n(C)}. \tag{2}$$

This quantity can be interpreted as 'the expectation of county opinion for a party chair respondent chosen at random.'

Likewise, party leaders' mean perception can be estimated with:

$$\widehat{\bar{p}_i} = \frac{\sum_{c \in C} \left[p_{c,i} w_c * \frac{\bar{s_c}}{s_c} \right]}{n(C)} \approx \bar{p}_i. \tag{3}$$

Our analysis at the state level is identical, except with s_c corresponding to the size of each CCES respondents' state. We cluster the standard errors at the county level for our county analysis and at the state level for our state analysis. Note that the county analysis excludes the states where parties are not organized at the county level because the levels at which these parties are organized (parish, etc.) are not available in the CCES data: LA, AK, ND, CT, and MA.

D Details of MRP Estimation Procedure

Estimation of an MRP model proceeds in two stages. First, a hierarchical logistic choice model is estimated for the opinion item being studied. Our models include predictors at two different levels. At the individual level, we include random effects for the respondent's education, gender, and race/ethnicity. At the state level, we include individual state random effects and fixed effects for Obama's share of the 2012 Presidential vote in the state (see Lax and Phillips (2009*a*)). State random effects are centered around regional random effects.[41]

D.1 Hierarchical Model

The general form of the model is a varying intercept, varying slope model:

$$\theta_j = logit^{-1}(X_j\beta + \sum_s \alpha^S_{S(j)}) \tag{4}$$

where j indexes cells, each of which is identified by the unique combination of race, gender, education, and state, and S represents subsets of the grouping variables. β represents the fixed effects and is modeled with a uniform prior distribution. α^S are random effects, modeled with hierarchical Gaussian priors.

The response model is specified as:

$$Pr(y=1) = logit^{-1}(\beta_0 + \alpha^{gender}_{j[c]} + \alpha^{race}_{k[c]} + \alpha^{edu}_{l[c]} + \alpha^{gender\times race}_{m[c]} + \alpha^{state}_{s[c]} + \alpha^{region}_{r[c]}) \tag{5}$$

The individual-level random effects are modeled as:

$$\alpha^{gender}_j \sim N(0, \sigma^2_{gender}) \text{ for } j = 1, 2 \tag{6}$$

[41] The models are estimated using the `glmer()` function in `R`.

$$\alpha_k^{race} \sim N(0, \sigma_{race}^2) \text{ for } k = 1, 2, 3 \tag{7}$$

$$\alpha_l^{age} \sim N(0, \sigma_{age}^2) \text{ for } l = 1...4 \tag{8}$$

$$\alpha_m^{edu} \sim N(0, \sigma_{edu}^2) \text{ for } m = 1...4 \tag{9}$$

The state and region effects are modeled:

$$\alpha_s^{state} \sim N(\alpha_{[r]}^{region} + \beta presvote, \sigma_{state}^2) \text{ for } s = 1...50 \tag{10}$$

$$\alpha_r^{region} \sim N(0, \sigma_{region}^2) \text{ for } r = 1...4 \tag{11}$$

This model yields predictions for the share of individuals in any given state who support same-sex marriage or universal health care in all possible combinations of race, gender, and education. Because of the CCES' large sample size, the state-level random effects dominate the estimation, meaning MRP makes only slight adjustments to the disaggregated data from the CCES.

D.2 Poststratification

The final step in constructing state-level estimates is poststratification. We first use data from the US Census American Community Survey 2013 5-Year file to calculate the share of individuals in each state that fall into each 'cell': for example, of all the individuals living in California, what share of them are college-educated white women? These official US Census estimates are exceptionally accurate.

We then merge these cell-level state proportion estimates from the Census with our cell-level opinion estimates from the multilevel regression model to construct the state-level opinion estimates. This poststratification process is a straightforward aggregation process by which estimates

for each cell θ_j in each state are summed in proportion to the share of the state that they represent. Note that the cells in each state are exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

$$\theta_{state} = \frac{\sum_{j \in J_{state}} N_j \theta_j}{\sum_{j \in J_{state}} N_j} \tag{12}$$

The result of this poststratification process are estimates of state support for each issue for each of the nation's states.

E Details of conjoint experiment survey instrument

Table 1 lists the attributes that the hypothetical candidates could have. Attributes were fully randomized, with the exception of age, which was constant, with the first profile always being 43 years old and the second profile always being 47 years old. Two different sents of first names were used for the two profiles in order to ensure that no pair of candidates had the same name. Figure OA11 shows how a respondent on the online survey would have seen the experiment.

Figure OA11: Survey Instrument Example

Suppose there is a primary for an open county board seat in your local party area and the two individuals below are considering running for the seat. We'd like you to consider the following two potential candidates for this office.

	Potential Candidate A	Potential Candidate B
Name	Lauren	Alexander
Age	47	43
Occupation	Small business owner	Factory worker
Experience in party	None	None
Life circumstances	Is independently wealthy	Military veteran
Talents	Well known in community	Physically attractive
Positions and ideology	Somewhat more liberal than the typical voter from your party in your county	Somewhat more conservative than the typical voter from your party in your county

Which one of the above candidates would you be more likely to encourage to run for office?

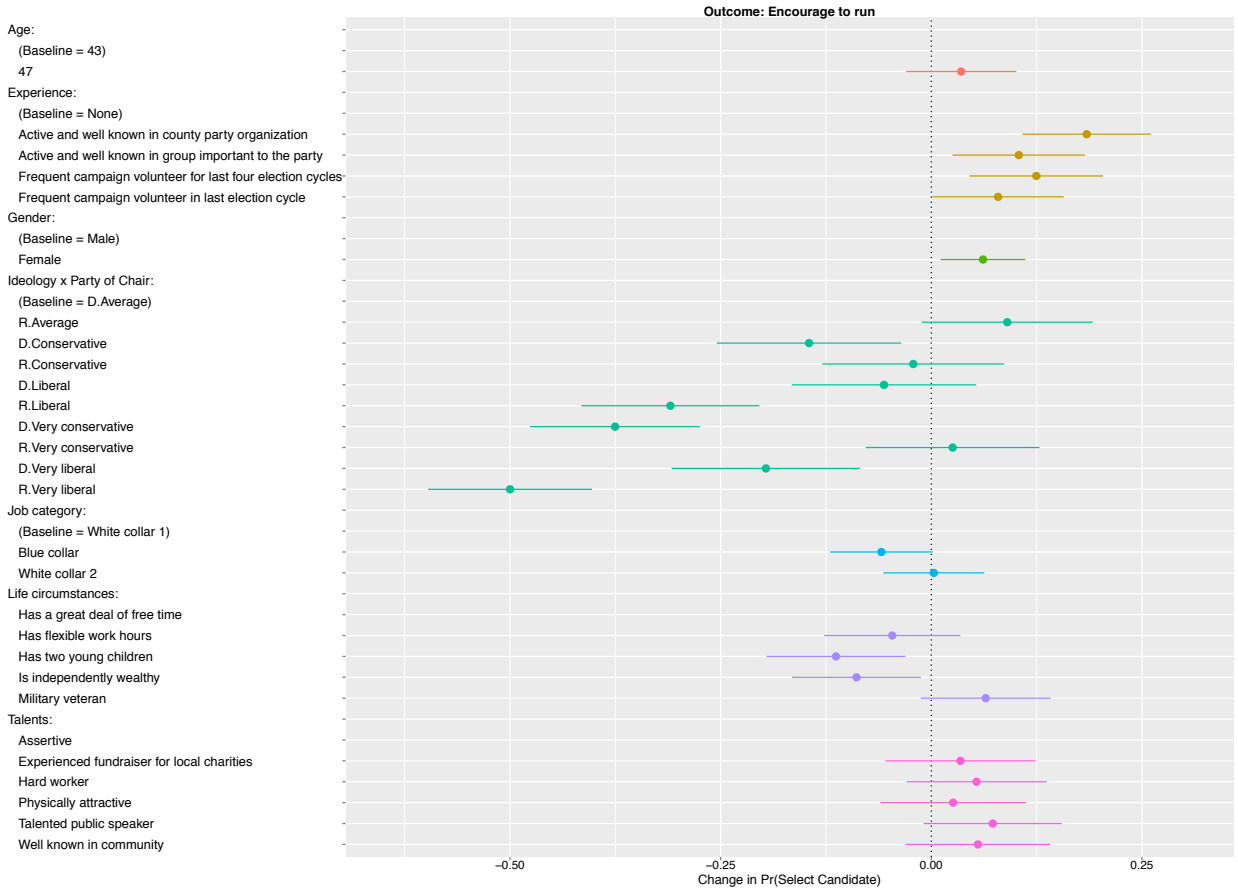
- ○ Candidate A
- ○ Candidate B

F Conjoint experiment: Robustness and additional outcome variables

This section shows the full results of the conjoint experiments for all dependent variables, for all the treatment variables in the conjoint, and among all the subsamples we mention in the paper. For the full sample, we report the results as both figures and tables; for other subsamples, we present only the figures for space (tables available upon request from the authors). In the party-ideology interactions, the letter "D" or "R" indicates the chair's party, and the ideology label reflects the potential candidate's ideology relative to the median party member. Democratic chairs evaluating a candidate whose ideology is average for the party are the omitted category. Thus, "D.Very conservative" reflects a Democratic chair evaluating a very *moderate* candidate—as a Democratic candidate much more conservative than the party would be more centrist—while "R.Very conservative" reflects a Republican chair evaluating a very *extreme* candidate.

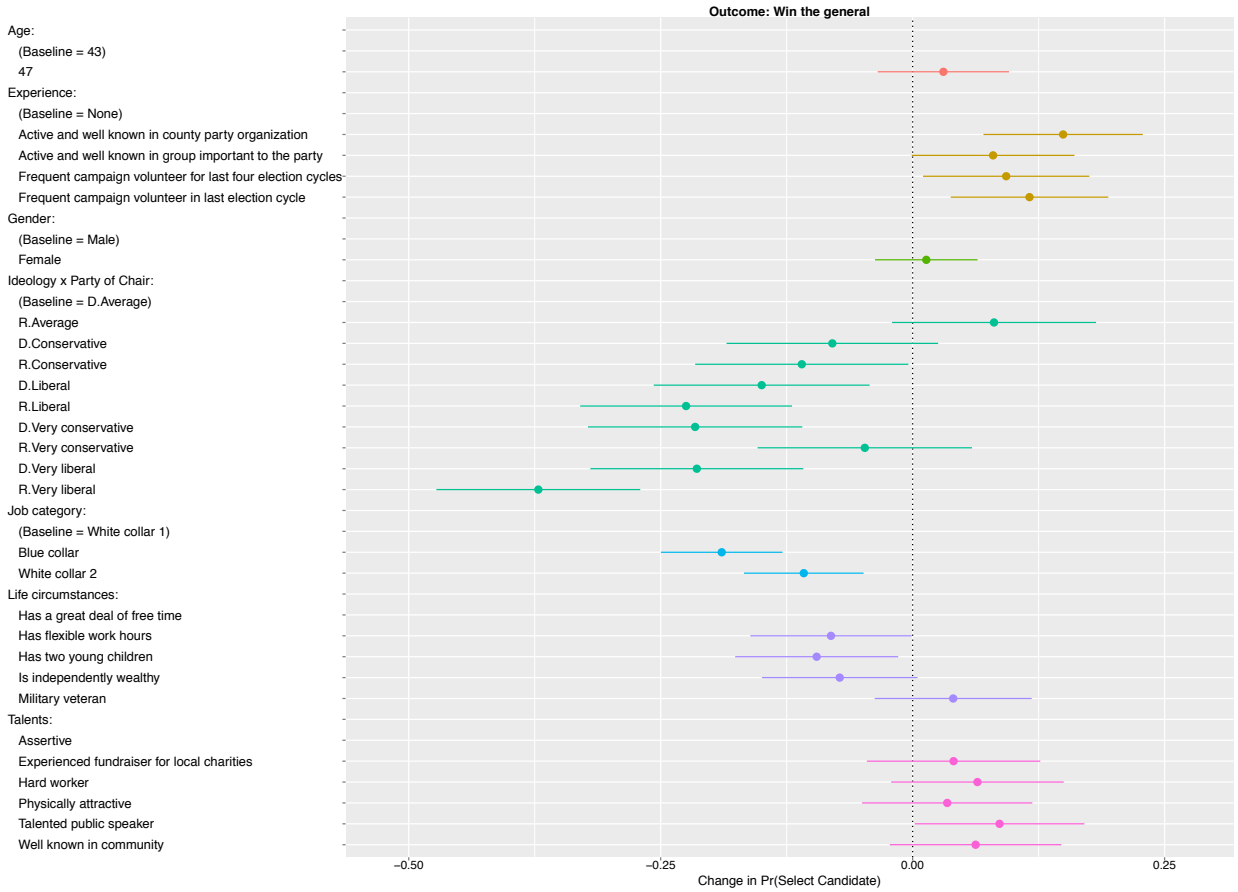
F.1 All conjoint experiment outcomes: full sample

Figure OA12: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate would you encourage to run?



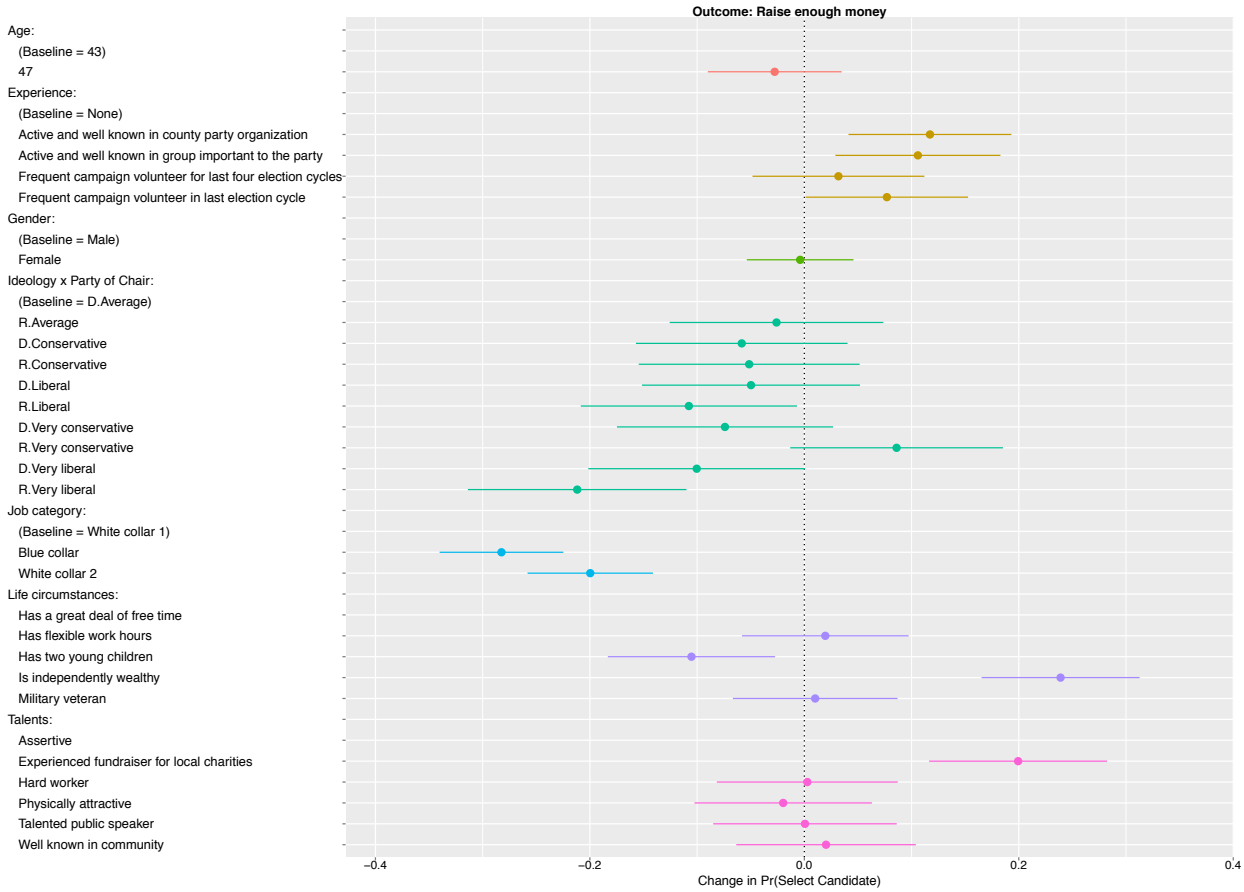
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample for the outcome, "which candidate would you encourage to run?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals. See Section F for interpretation.

Figure OA13: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is more likely to win the general election?



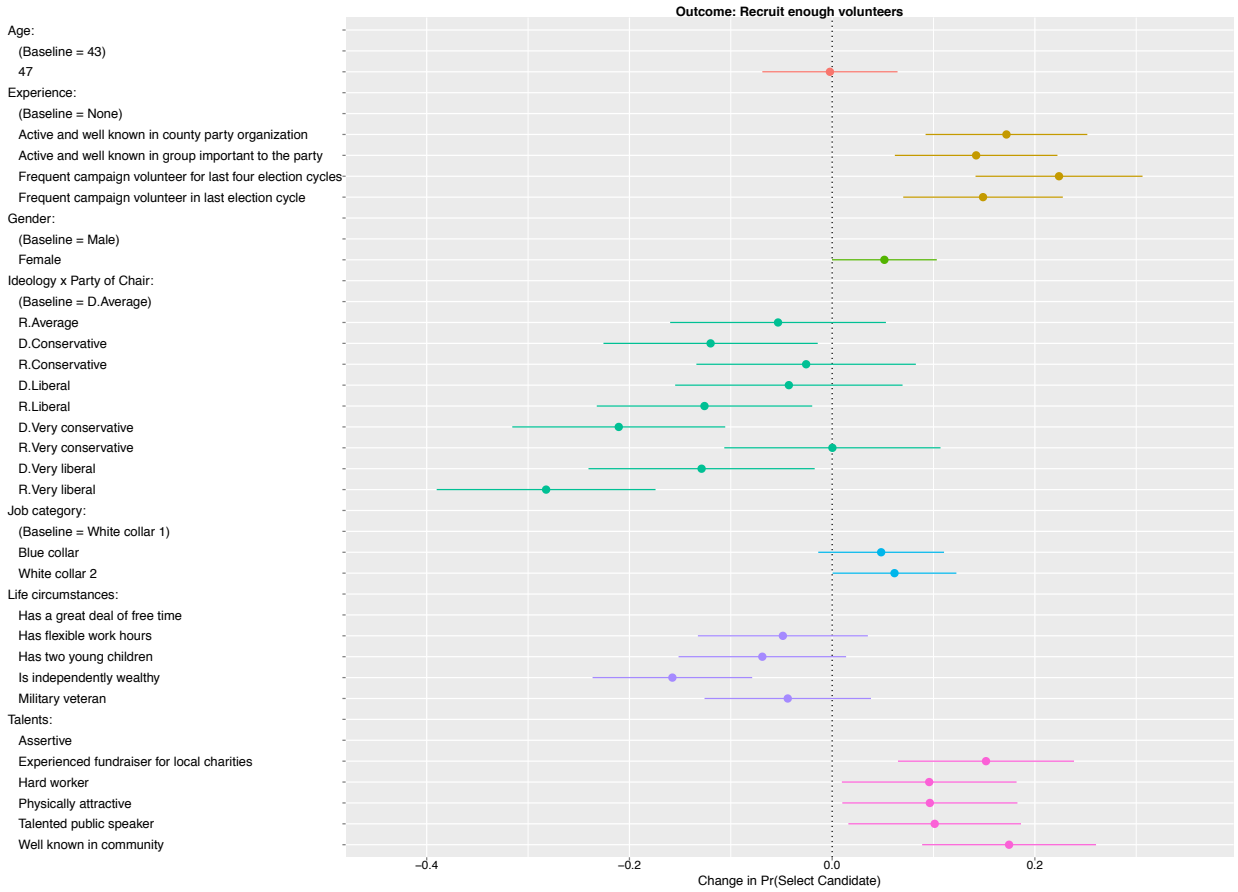
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to win the general election?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals. See Section F for interpretation.

Figure OA14: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is likely to raise enough money?



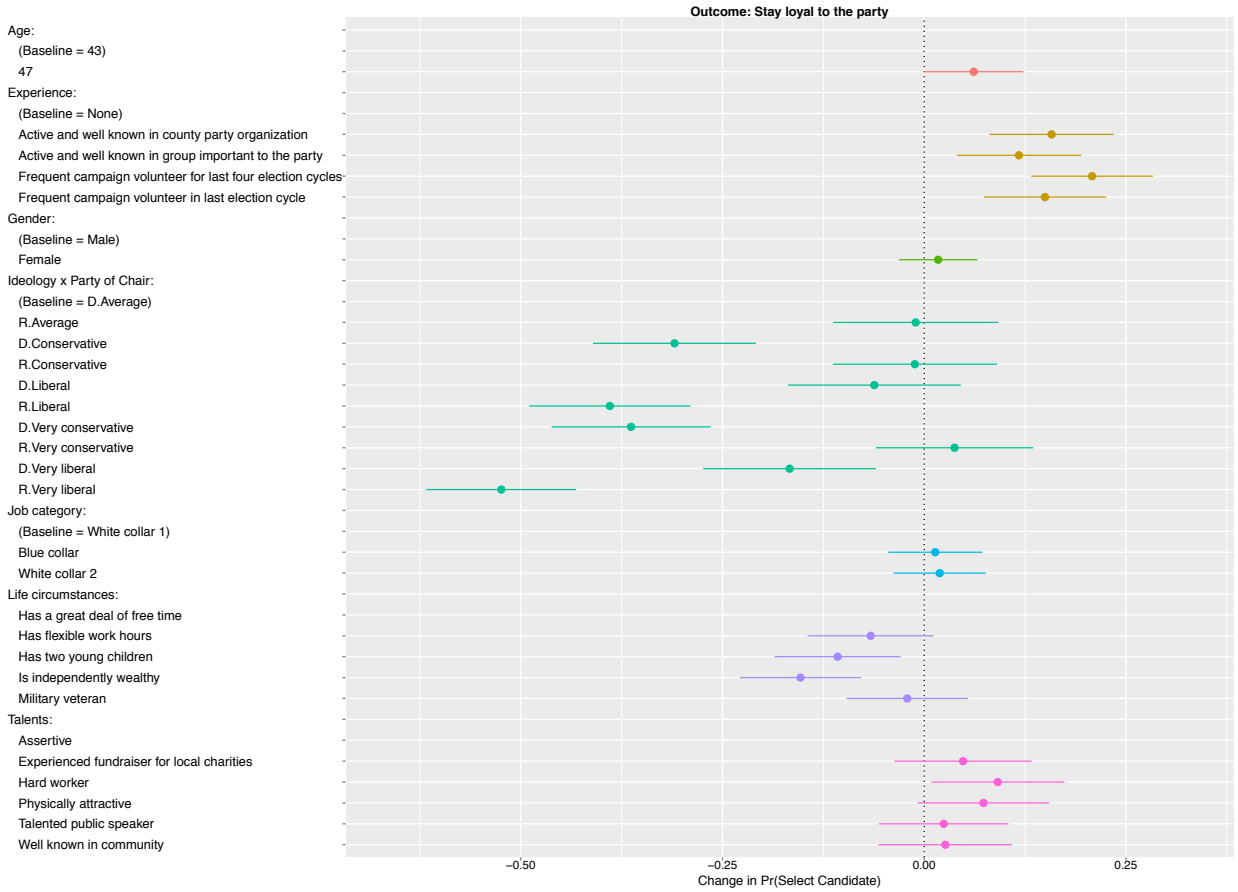
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to raise enough money?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals. See Section F for interpretation.

Figure OA15: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is most likely to recruit enough volunteers?



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to recruit enough volunteers?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals. See Section F for interpretation.

Figure OA16: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is most likely to stay loyal to the party?



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to stay loyal to the party?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA4: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate would you encourage to run?

	Dependent variable:
	Encourage to run
Age 47	0.035 (0.025)
Female	0.061** (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.059* (0.031)
White collar 2	0.003 (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.184*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.104** (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.125*** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.079** (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	−0.046 (0.041)
Has two young children	−0.113*** (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.089** (0.040)
Military veteran	0.064 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.035 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.054 (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.026 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.073* (0.044)
Well known in community	0.055 (0.044)
R.Average	0.090 (0.059)
D.Conservative	−0.145*** (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.021 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.056 (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.310*** (0.059)
D.Very conservative	−0.375*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	0.025 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.196*** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.500*** (0.059)
Constant	0.514*** (0.067)
Observations	1,345
R^2	0.163
Adjusted R^2	0.147
Residual Std. Error	0.462 (df = 1318)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA5: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is more likely to win the general election?

	Dependent variable:
	Win the general
Age 47	0.031 (0.025)
Female	0.014 (0.025)
Blue collar	-0.189^{***} (0.031)
White collar 2	-0.108^{***} (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.149^{***} (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.080^{**} (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.093^{**} (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.116^{***} (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	-0.081^{**} (0.040)
Has two young children	-0.095^{**} (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	-0.072^{*} (0.040)
Military veteran	0.040 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.041 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.064 (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.034 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.086^{**} (0.044)
Well known in community	0.062 (0.044)
R.Average	0.081 (0.058)
D.Conservative	-0.080 (0.055)
R.Conservative	-0.110^{*} (0.058)
D.Liberal	-0.150^{***} (0.055)
R.Liberal	-0.225^{***} (0.059)
D.Very conservative	-0.216^{***} (0.054)
R.Very conservative	-0.047 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	-0.214^{***} (0.056)
R.Very liberal	-0.371^{***} (0.059)
Constant	0.601^{***} (0.067)
Observations	1,437
R^2	0.107
Adjusted R^2	0.091
Residual Std. Error	0.477 (df = 1410)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA6: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is more likely to raise enough money?

	Dependent variable:
	Raise enough money
Age 47	−0.028 (0.025)
Female	−0.004 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.282*** (0.030)
White collar 2	−0.200*** (0.030)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.117*** (0.039)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.106*** (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.032 (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.077** (0.039)
Has flexible work hours	0.020 (0.039)
Has two young children	−0.105*** (0.039)
Is independently wealthy	0.239*** (0.039)
Military veteran	0.010 (0.039)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.199*** (0.043)
Hard worker	0.003 (0.043)
Physically attractive	−0.020 (0.043)
Talented public speaker	0.001 (0.043)
Well known in community	0.020 (0.043)
R.Average	−0.026 (0.057)
D.Conservative	−0.058 (0.053)
R.Conservative	−0.051 (0.057)
D.Liberal	−0.050 (0.053)
R.Liberal	−0.108* (0.058)
D.Very conservative	−0.074 (0.053)
R.Very conservative	0.086 (0.057)
D.Very liberal	−0.100* (0.055)
R.Very liberal	−0.212*** (0.058)
Constant	0.572*** (0.065)
Observations	1,425
R^2	0.160
Adjusted R^2	0.144
Residual Std. Error	0.463 (df = 1398)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA7: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is more likely to recruit enough volunteers?

	Dependent variable:
	Recruit enough volunteers
Age 47	−0.002 (0.026)
Female	0.052** (0.026)
Blue collar	0.048 (0.031)
White collar 2	0.062** (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.172*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.142*** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.224*** (0.042)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.149*** (0.041)
Has flexible work hours	−0.049 (0.041)
Has two young children	−0.069* (0.041)
Is independently wealthy	−0.158*** (0.041)
Military veteran	−0.044 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.152*** (0.045)
Hard worker	0.096** (0.045)
Physically attractive	0.096** (0.045)
Talented public speaker	0.101** (0.044)
Well known in community	0.175*** (0.045)
R.Average	−0.053 (0.059)
D.Conservative	−0.120** (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.026 (0.059)
D.Liberal	−0.043 (0.056)
R.Liberal	−0.126** (0.060)
D.Very conservative	−0.211*** (0.055)
R.Very conservative	0.0003 (0.059)
D.Very liberal	−0.129** (0.057)
R.Very liberal	−0.282*** (0.060)
Constant	0.364*** (0.068)
Observations	1,419
R^2	0.081
Adjusted R^2	0.064
Residual Std. Error	0.484 (df = 1392)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA8: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is more likely to stay loyal to the party?

	Dependent variable:
	Stay loyal to the party
Age 47	0.061** (0.024)
Female	0.017 (0.024)
Blue collar	0.014 (0.030)
White collar 2	0.019 (0.030)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.158*** (0.038)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.117*** (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.208*** (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.150*** (0.038)
Has flexible work hours	−0.066* (0.039)
Has two young children	−0.107*** (0.039)
Is independently wealthy	−0.153*** (0.039)
Military veteran	−0.021 (0.039)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.048 (0.043)
Hard worker	0.091** (0.042)
Physically attractive	0.073* (0.042)
Talented public speaker	0.024 (0.042)
Well known in community	0.026 (0.042)
R.Average	−0.011 (0.057)
D.Conservative	−0.309*** (0.053)
R.Conservative	−0.012 (0.056)
D.Liberal	−0.062 (0.053)
R.Liberal	−0.390*** (0.057)
D.Very conservative	−0.363*** (0.052)
R.Very conservative	0.038 (0.056)
D.Very liberal	−0.167*** (0.054)
R.Very liberal	−0.524*** (0.057)
Constant	0.531*** (0.065)
Observations	1,423
R^2	0.175
Adjusted R^2	0.159
Residual Std. Error	0.459 (df = 1396)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA9: Conjoint results: Full Sample. Outcome: Which candidate is more likely to be an effective legislator?

	Dependent variable:
	Be an effective legislator
Age 47	0.068*** (0.025)
Female	0.023 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.055* (0.030)
White collar 2	−0.021 (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.126*** (0.039)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.096** (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.123*** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.095** (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	0.010 (0.040)
Has two young children	−0.039 (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.057 (0.040)
Military veteran	0.061 (0.040)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	−0.006 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.073* (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.012 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.046 (0.043)
Well known in community	0.017 (0.044)
R.Average	0.066 (0.058)
D.Conservative	−0.146*** (0.054)
R.Conservative	−0.029 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.062 (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.338*** (0.060)
D.Very conservative	−0.374*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	0.006 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.174*** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.495*** (0.059)
Constant	0.527*** (0.066)
Observations	1,389
R^2	0.143
Adjusted R^2	0.127
Residual Std. Error	0.467 (df = 1362)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample. See Section F for interpretation.

F.2 Conjoint outcomes with multiple comparisons correction

In Tables OA10, OA11, OA12, OA13, OA14, OA15, and OA16, we report the full-sample conjoint experiment results after applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons to the p-values. By design, this adjustment makes some of the estimated AMCEs not significant at $p < 0.05$, but in most cases the ideology manipulations that are the focus of our analysis remain significant even after this correction. Note that these regressions use separately estimate the "liberal"/"very liberal" and "conservative"/"very conservative" categories and use Democratic chairs with typical candidates as a baseline.

Table OA10: Conjoint results: Full Sample with Bonferroni correction. Outcome: Which candidate would you encourage to run?

	Dependent variable:
	Encourage to run
Age 47	0.035 (0.025)
Female	0.061 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.059 (0.031)
White collar 2	0.003 (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.184*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.104 (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.125* (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.079 (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	−0.046 (0.041)
Has two young children	−0.113 (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.089 (0.040)
Military veteran	0.064 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.035 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.054 (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.026 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.073 (0.044)
Well known in community	0.055 (0.044)
R.Average	0.090 (0.059)
D.Conservative	−0.145 (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.021 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.056 (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.310*** (0.059)
D.Very conservative	−0.375*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	0.025 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.196** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.500*** (0.059)
Constant	0.514*** (0.067)
Observations	1,345
R^2	0.163
Adjusted R^2	0.147
Residual Std. Error	0.462 (df = 1318)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample with Bonferroni correction. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA11: Conjoint results: Full Sample with Bonferroni correction. Outcome: Which is more likely to win the primary?

	Dependent variable:
	Win the primary
Age 47	−0.017 (0.025)
Female	0.024 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.096** (0.030)
White collar 2	−0.032 (0.030)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.156*** (0.039)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.109 (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.096 (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.106 (0.039)
Has flexible work hours	−0.072 (0.040)
Has two young children	−0.113 (0.039)
Is independently wealthy	−0.090 (0.040)
Military veteran	0.039 (0.040)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.055 (0.043)
Hard worker	0.063 (0.043)
Physically attractive	0.020 (0.043)
Talented public speaker	0.093 (0.043)
Well known in community	0.032 (0.043)
R.Average	0.002 (0.057)
D.Conservative	−0.176** (0.054)
R.Conservative	−0.072 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.122 (0.054)
R.Liberal	−0.319*** (0.058)
D.Very conservative	−0.316*** (0.053)
R.Very conservative	0.036 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.190** (0.055)
R.Very liberal	−0.484*** (0.058)
Constant	0.607*** (0.066)
Observations	1,447
R^2	0.125
Adjusted R^2	0.109
Residual Std. Error	0.472 (df = 1420)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample with Bonferroni correction. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA12: Conjoint results: Full Sample with Bonferroni correction. Outcome: Which is more likely to win the general election?

	Dependent variable:
	Win the general
Age 47	0.031 (0.025)
Female	0.014 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.189*** (0.031)
White collar 2	−0.108** (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.149*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.080 (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.093 (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.116* (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	−0.081 (0.040)
Has two young children	−0.095 (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.072 (0.040)
Military veteran	0.040 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.041 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.064 (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.034 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.086 (0.044)
Well known in community	0.062 (0.044)
R.Average	0.081 (0.058)
D.Conservative	−0.080 (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.110 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.150 (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.225*** (0.059)
D.Very conservative	−0.216*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	−0.047 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.214*** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.371*** (0.059)
Constant	0.601*** (0.067)
Observations	1,437
R^2	0.107
Adjusted R^2	0.091
Residual Std. Error	0.477 (df = 1410)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample with Bonferroni correction. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA13: Conjoint results: Full Sample with Bonferroni correction. Outcome: Which is more likely to raise enough money?

	Dependent variable:
	Raise enough money
Age 47	−0.028 (0.025)
Female	−0.004 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.282*** (0.030)
White collar 2	−0.200*** (0.030)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.117* (0.039)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.106 (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.032 (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.077 (0.039)
Has flexible work hours	0.020 (0.039)
Has two young children	−0.105 (0.039)
Is independently wealthy	0.239*** (0.039)
Military veteran	0.010 (0.039)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.199*** (0.043)
Hard worker	0.003 (0.043)
Physically attractive	−0.020 (0.043)
Talented public speaker	0.001 (0.043)
Well known in community	0.020 (0.043)
R.Average	−0.026 (0.057)
D.Conservative	−0.058 (0.053)
R.Conservative	−0.051 (0.057)
D.Liberal	−0.050 (0.053)
R.Liberal	−0.108 (0.058)
D.Very conservative	−0.074 (0.053)
R.Very conservative	0.086 (0.057)
D.Very liberal	−0.100 (0.055)
R.Very liberal	−0.212*** (0.058)
Constant	0.572*** (0.065)
Observations	1,425
R^2	0.160
Adjusted R^2	0.144
Residual Std. Error	0.463 (df = 1398)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample with Bonferroni correction. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA14: Conjoint results: Full Sample with Bonferroni correction. Outcome: Which is more likely to recruit enough volunteers?

	Dependent variable:
	Recruit enough volunteers
Age 47	−0.002 (0.026)
Female	0.052 (0.026)
Blue collar	0.048 (0.031)
White collar 2	0.062 (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.172*** (0.040)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.142** (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.224*** (0.042)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.149*** (0.041)
Has flexible work hours	−0.049 (0.041)
Has two young children	−0.069 (0.041)
Is independently wealthy	−0.158*** (0.041)
Military veteran	−0.044 (0.041)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.152** (0.045)
Hard worker	0.096 (0.045)
Physically attractive	0.096 (0.045)
Talented public speaker	0.101 (0.044)
Well known in community	0.175*** (0.045)
R.Average	−0.053 (0.059)
D.Conservative	−0.120 (0.055)
R.Conservative	−0.026 (0.059)
D.Liberal	−0.043 (0.056)
R.Liberal	−0.126 (0.060)
D.Very conservative	−0.211*** (0.055)
R.Very conservative	0.0003 (0.059)
D.Very liberal	−0.129 (0.057)
R.Very liberal	−0.282*** (0.060)
Constant	0.364*** (0.068)
Observations	1,419
R^2	0.081
Adjusted R^2	0.064
Residual Std. Error	0.484 (df = 1392)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample with Bonferroni correction. See Section F for interpretation.

Table OA15: Conjoint results: Full Sample with Bonferroni correction. Outcome: Which is more likely to stay loyal to the party?

	Dependent variable:
	Stay loyal to the party
Age 47	0.061 (0.024)
Female	0.017 (0.024)
Blue collar	0.014 (0.030)
White collar 2	0.019 (0.030)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.158*** (0.038)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.117* (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.208*** (0.039)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.150*** (0.038)
Has flexible work hours	−0.066 (0.039)
Has two young children	−0.107 (0.039)
Is independently wealthy	−0.153*** (0.039)
Military veteran	−0.021 (0.039)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	0.048 (0.043)
Hard worker	0.091 (0.042)
Physically attractive	0.073 (0.042)
Talented public speaker	0.024 (0.042)
Well known in community	0.026 (0.042)
R.Average	−0.011 (0.057)
D.Conservative	−0.309*** (0.053)
R.Conservative	−0.012 (0.056)
D.Liberal	−0.062 (0.053)
R.Liberal	−0.390*** (0.057)
D.Very conservative	−0.363*** (0.052)
R.Very conservative	0.038 (0.056)
D.Very liberal	−0.167* (0.054)
R.Very liberal	−0.524*** (0.057)
Constant	0.531*** (0.065)
Observations	1,423
R^2	0.175
Adjusted R^2	0.159
Residual Std. Error	0.459 (df = 1396)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Full sample with Bonferroni correction. See Section F for interpretation.

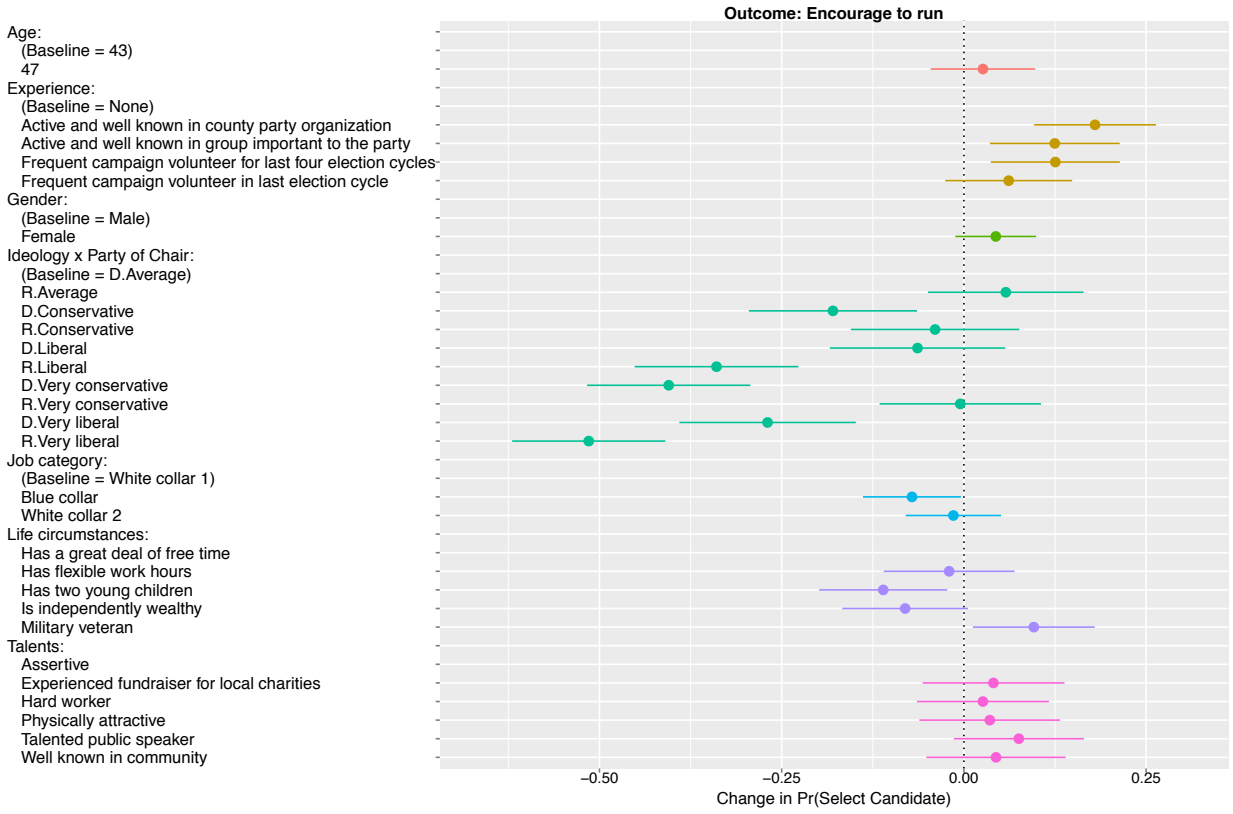
Table OA16: Conjoint results: Full Sample with Bonferroni correction. Outcome: Which is more likely to be an effective legislator?

	Dependent variable:
	Be an effective legislator
Age 47	0.068 (0.025)
Female	0.023 (0.025)
Blue collar	−0.055 (0.030)
White collar 2	−0.021 (0.031)
Active and well known in county party organization	0.126** (0.039)
Active and well known in group important to the party	0.096 (0.040)
Frequent campaign volunteer for last four election cycles	0.123* (0.041)
Frequent campaign volunteer in last election cycle	0.095 (0.040)
Has flexible work hours	0.010 (0.040)
Has two young children	−0.039 (0.040)
Is independently wealthy	−0.057 (0.040)
Military veteran	0.061 (0.040)
Experienced fundraiser for local charities	−0.006 (0.044)
Hard worker	0.073 (0.044)
Physically attractive	0.012 (0.044)
Talented public speaker	0.046 (0.043)
Well known in community	0.017 (0.044)
R.Average	0.066 (0.058)
D.Conservative	−0.146 (0.054)
R.Conservative	−0.029 (0.058)
D.Liberal	−0.062 (0.055)
R.Liberal	−0.338*** (0.060)
D.Very conservative	−0.374*** (0.054)
R.Very conservative	0.006 (0.058)
D.Very liberal	−0.174** (0.056)
R.Very liberal	−0.495*** (0.059)
Constant	0.527*** (0.066)
Observations	1,389
R^2	0.143
Adjusted R^2	0.127
Residual Std. Error	0.467 (df = 1362)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
	Full sample with Bonferroni correction.

F.3 All conjoint experiment outcomes: weighted to county population

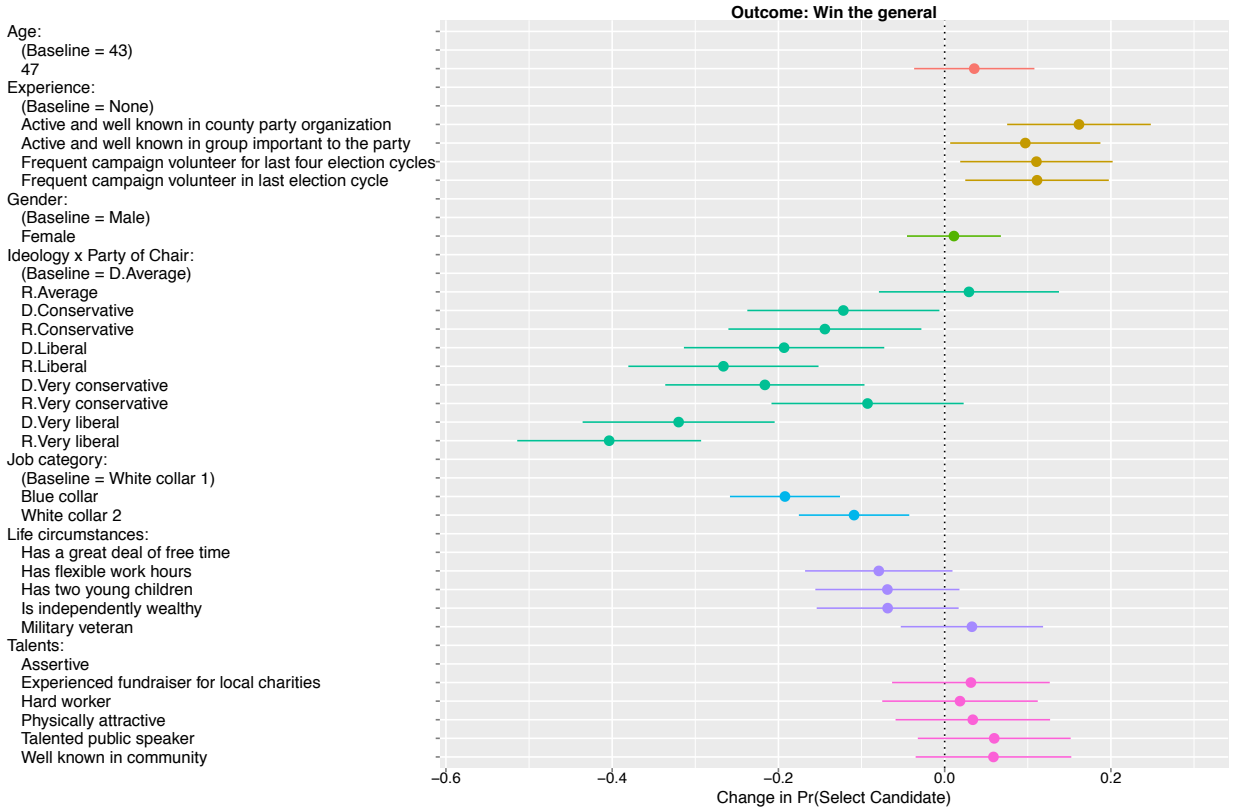
The figures in this section report the estimated AMCEs from the conjoint experiment after weighting by log(county population).

Figure OA17: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population



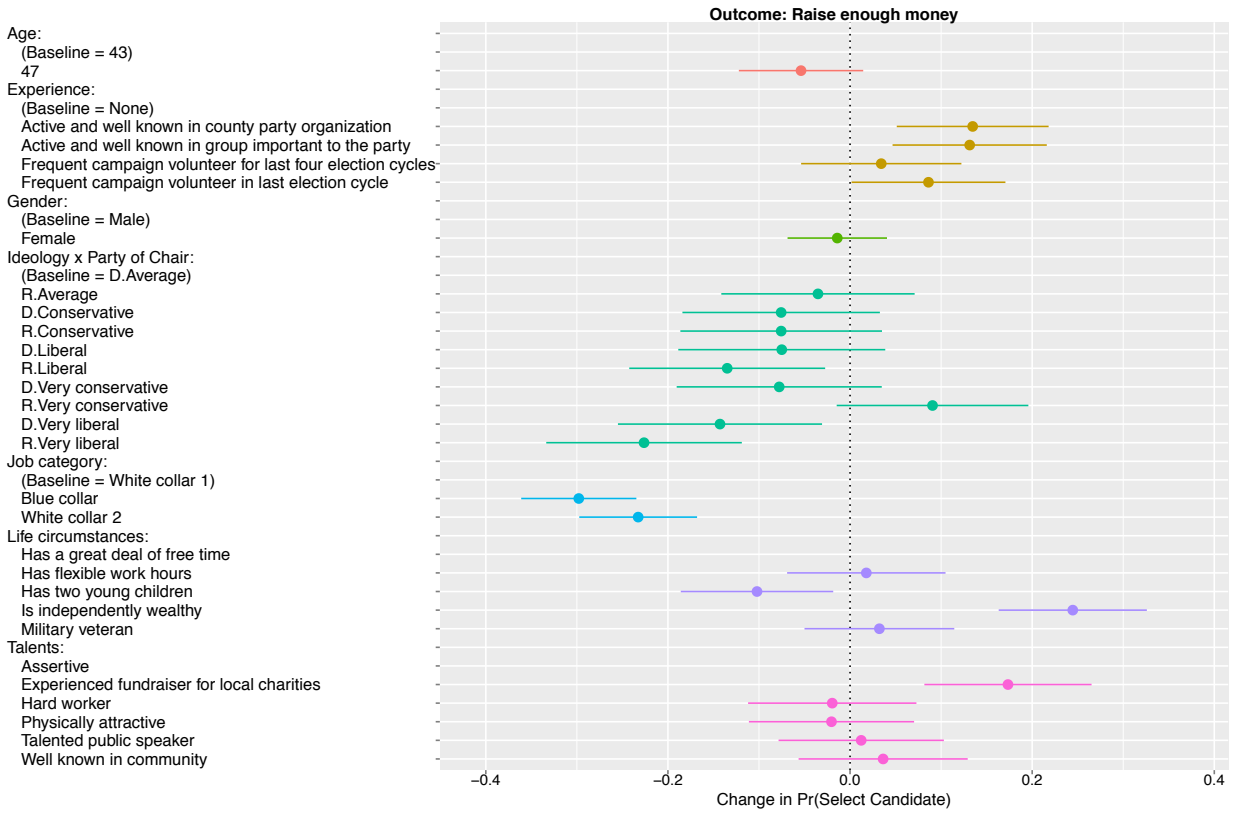
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample after weighting responses by log(county population) for the outcome, "which candidate would you encourage to run?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA18: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population



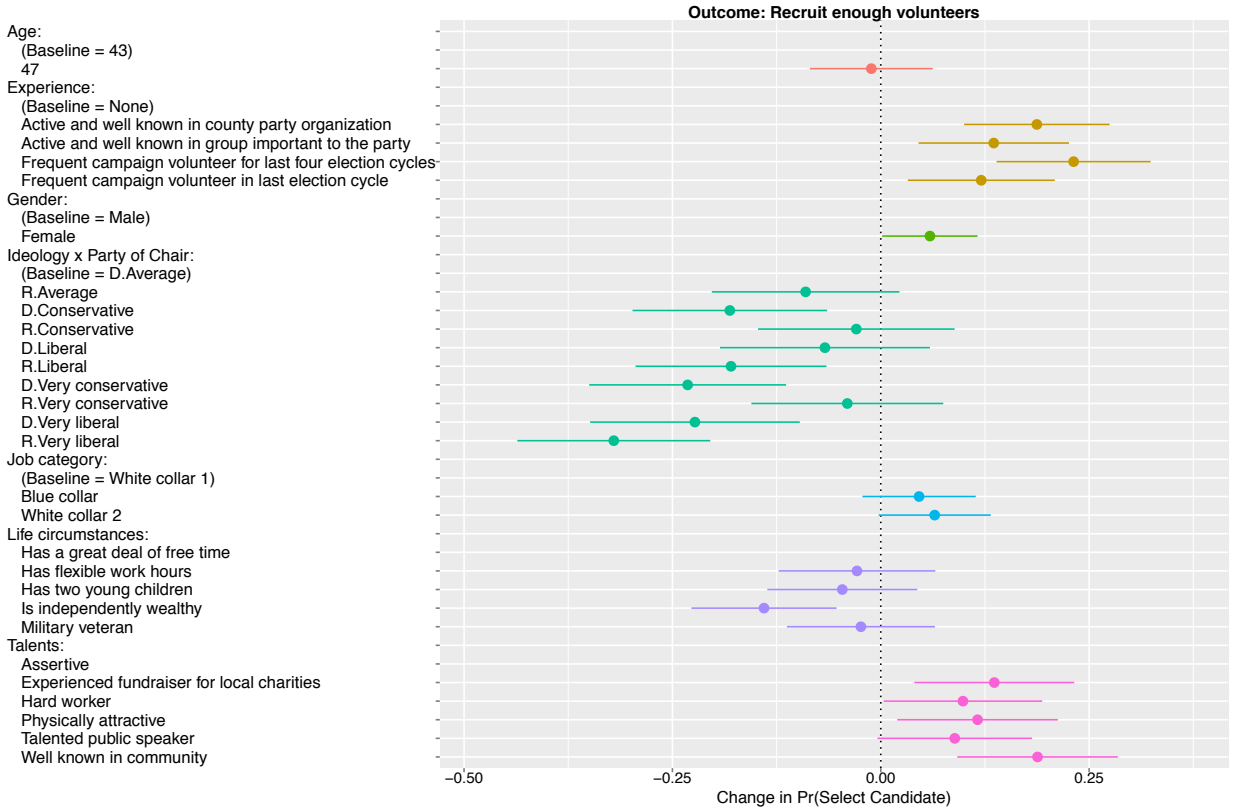
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample after weighting responses by log(county population) for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to win the general election?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA19: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population



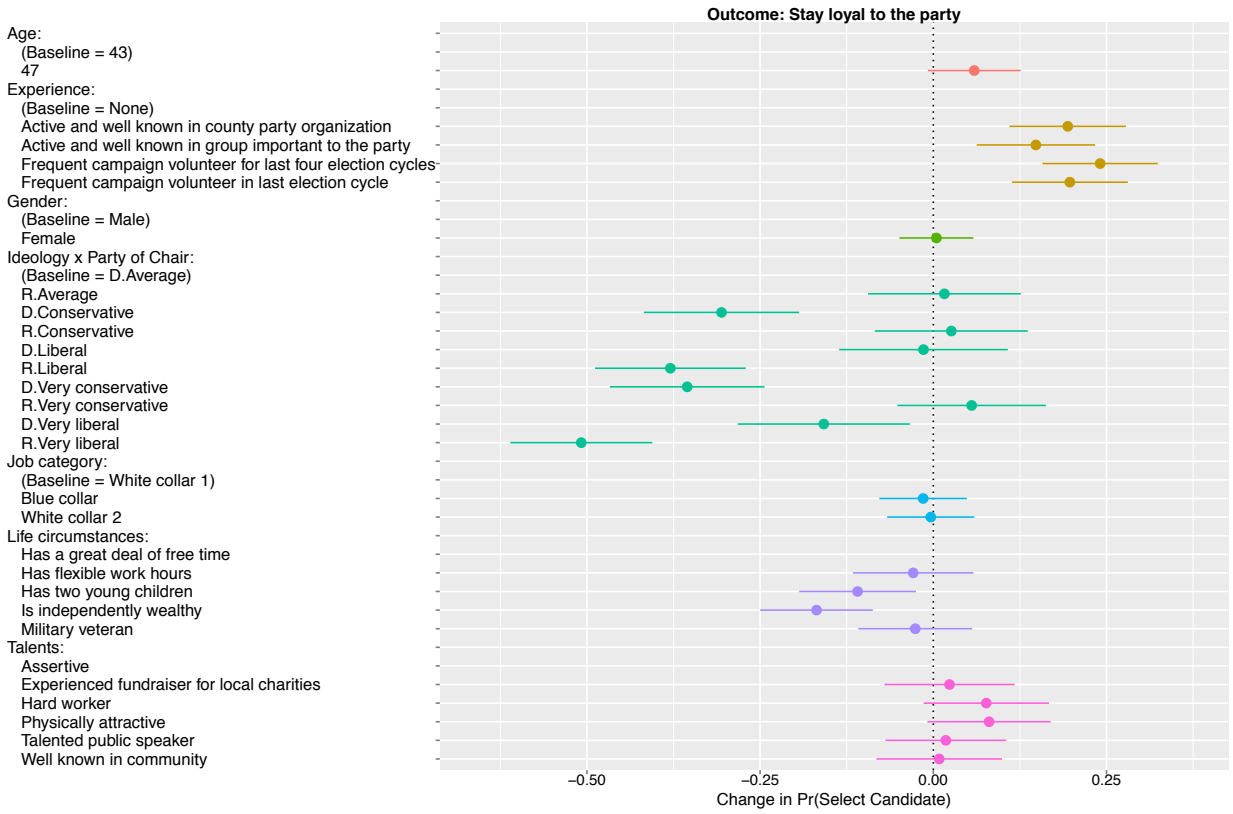
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample after weighting responses by log(county population) for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to raise enough money?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA20: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample after weighting responses by log(county population) for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to recruit enough volunteers?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA21: Conjoint results: Weighted to county population

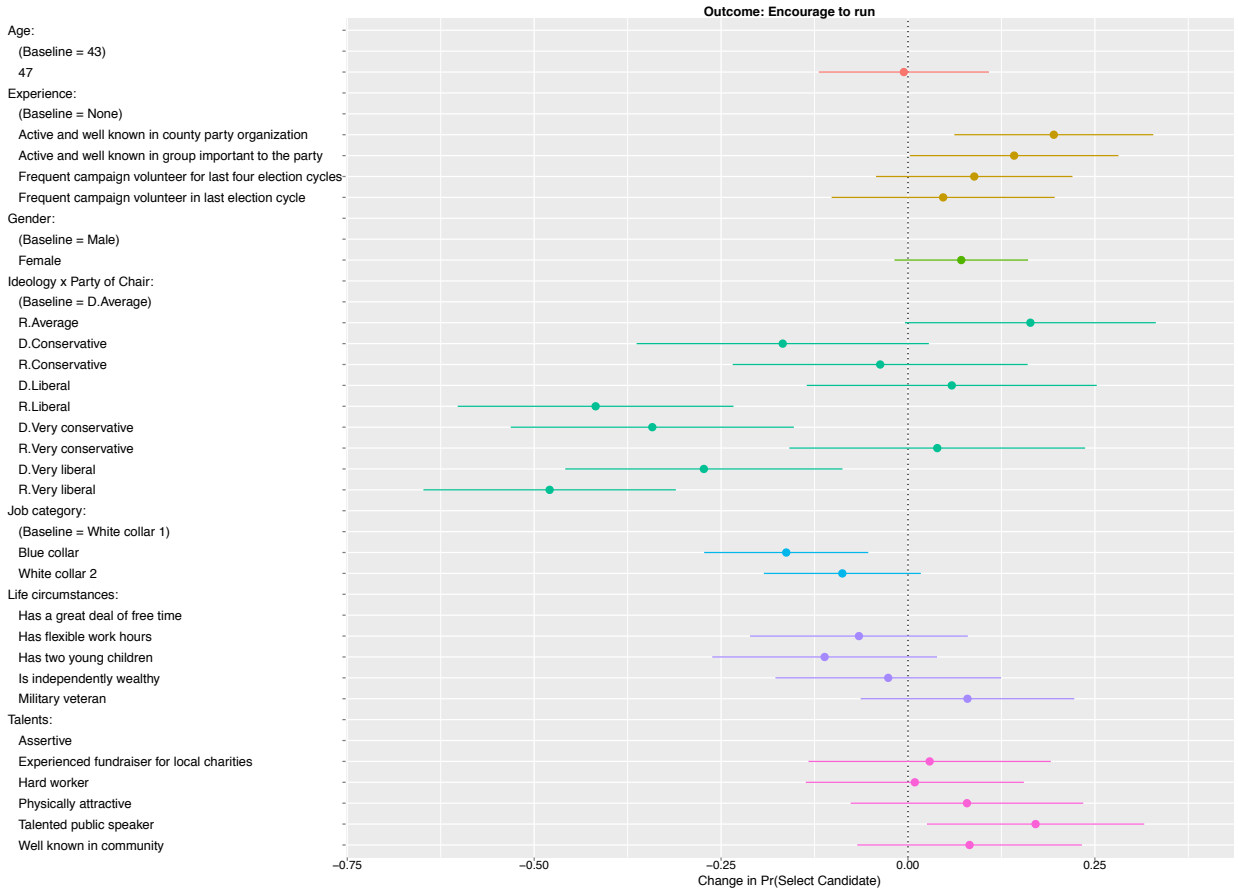


Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for the full sample after weighting responses by log(county population) for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to stay loyal to the party?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

F.4 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012

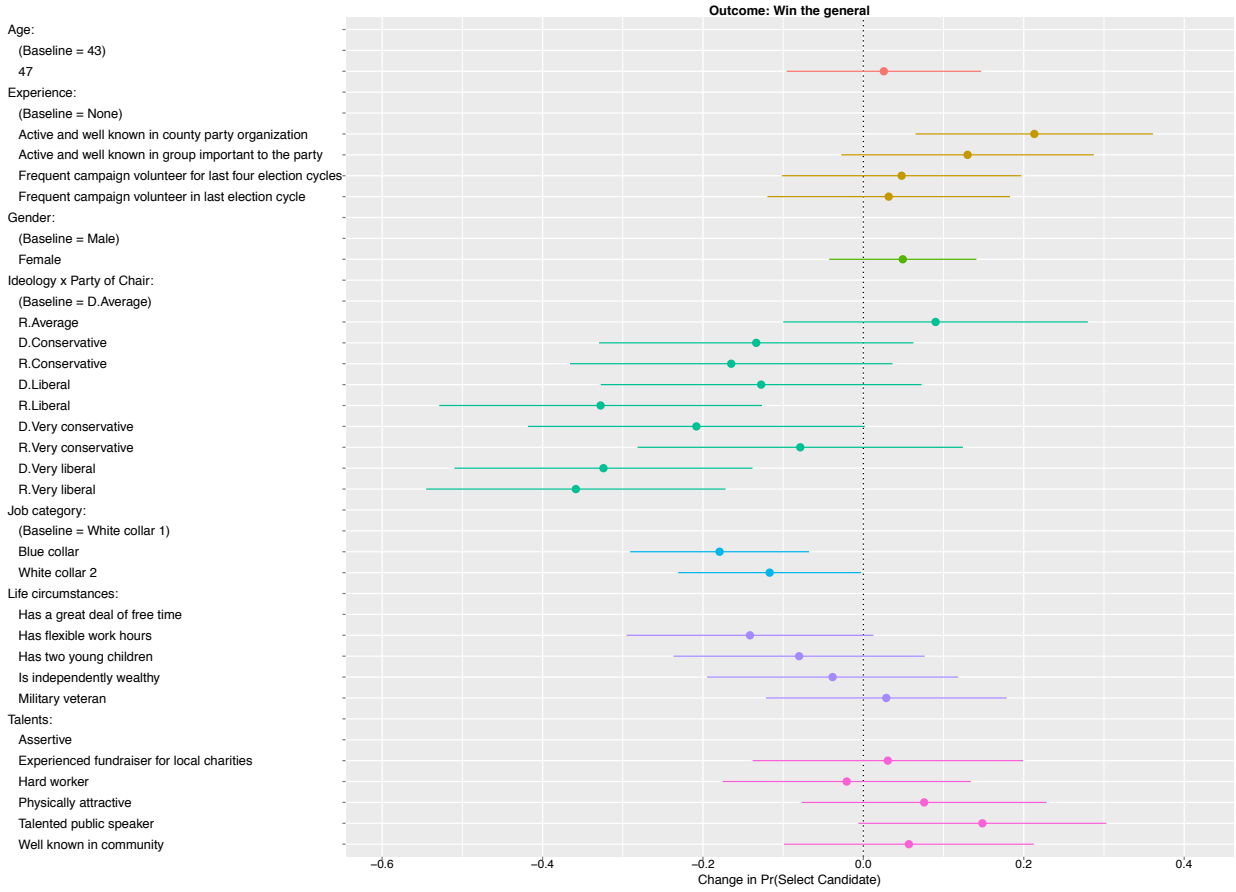
322 respondents were from these counties.

Figure OA22: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties



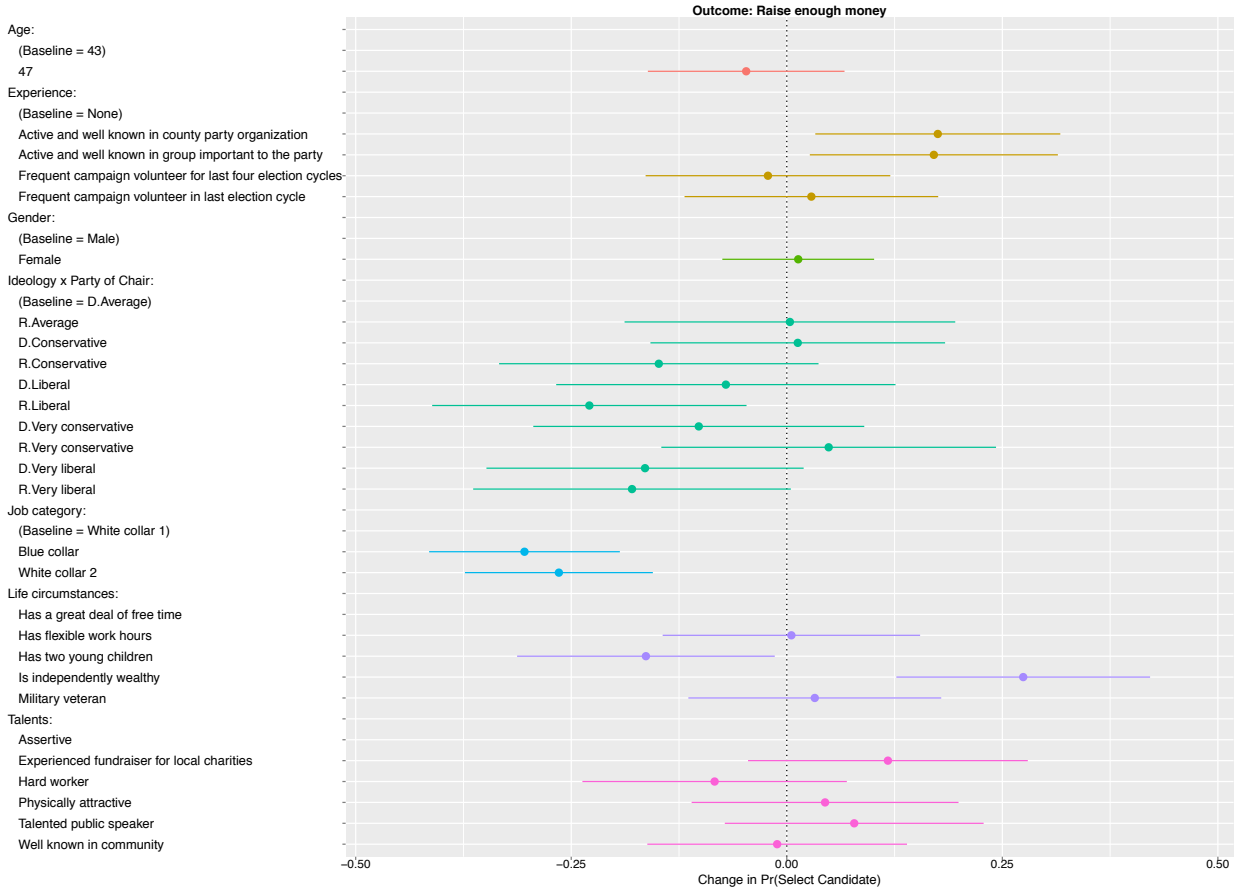
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for counties where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012 for the outcome, "which candidate would you encourage to run?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA23: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties



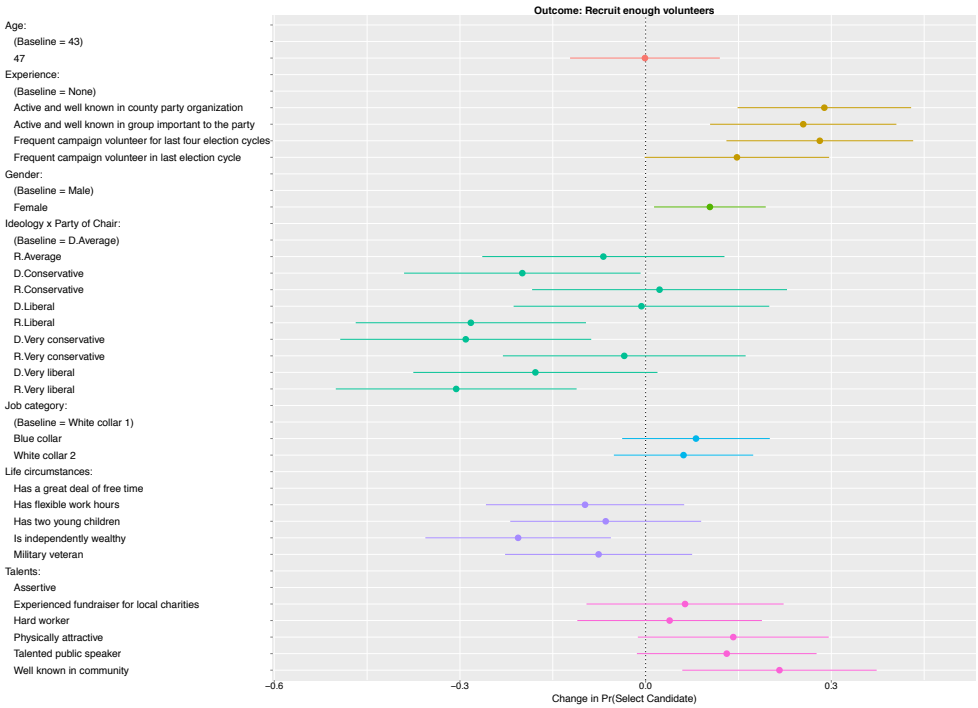
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for counties where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012 for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to win the general election?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA24: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties



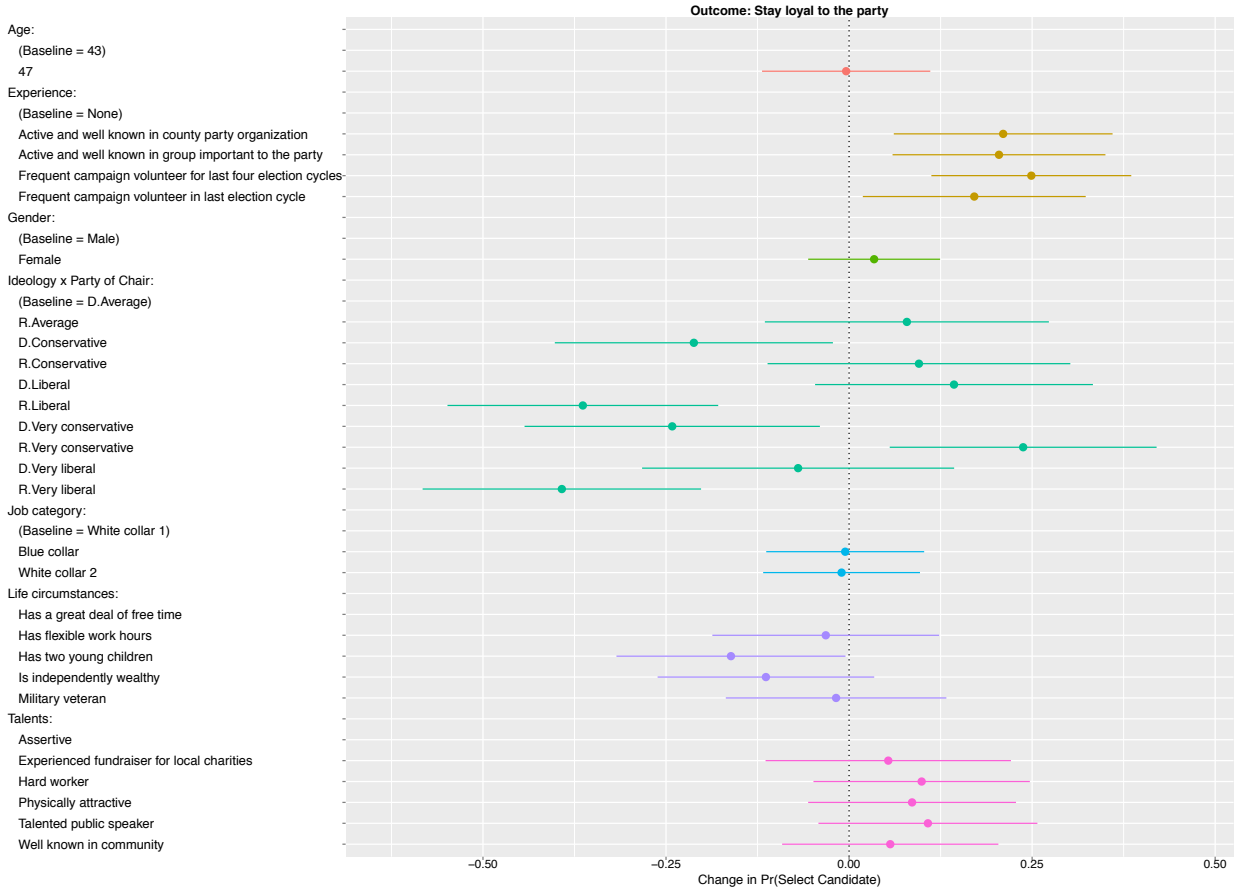
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for counties where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012 for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to raise enough money?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA25: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for counties where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012 for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to recruit enough volunteers?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA26: Conjoint results: Objectively competitive counties

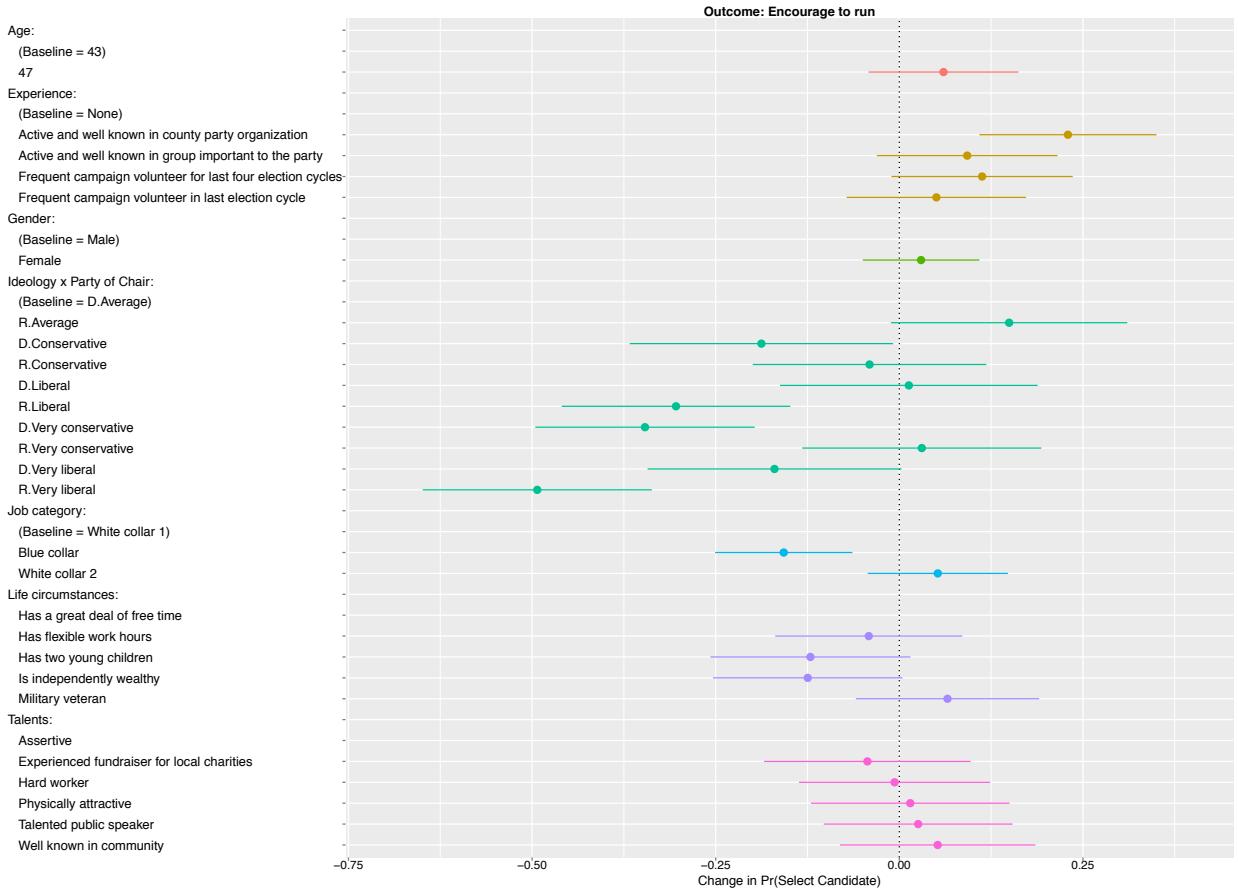


Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for counties where Obama received between 40% and 60% of the two-party vote in 2012 for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to stay loyal to the party?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

F.5 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where the chair perceives between 26% and 75% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates

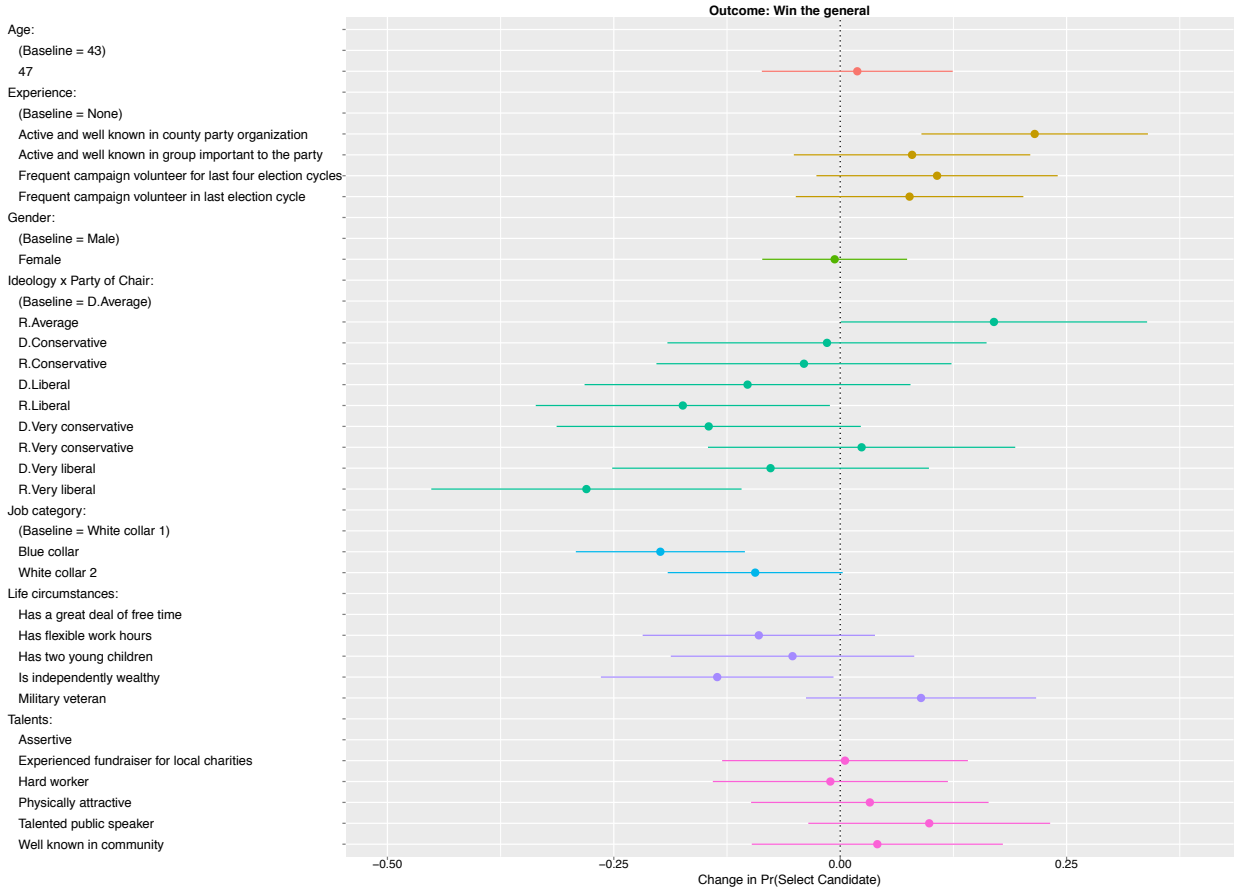
389 respondents were from these counties.

Figure OA27: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties



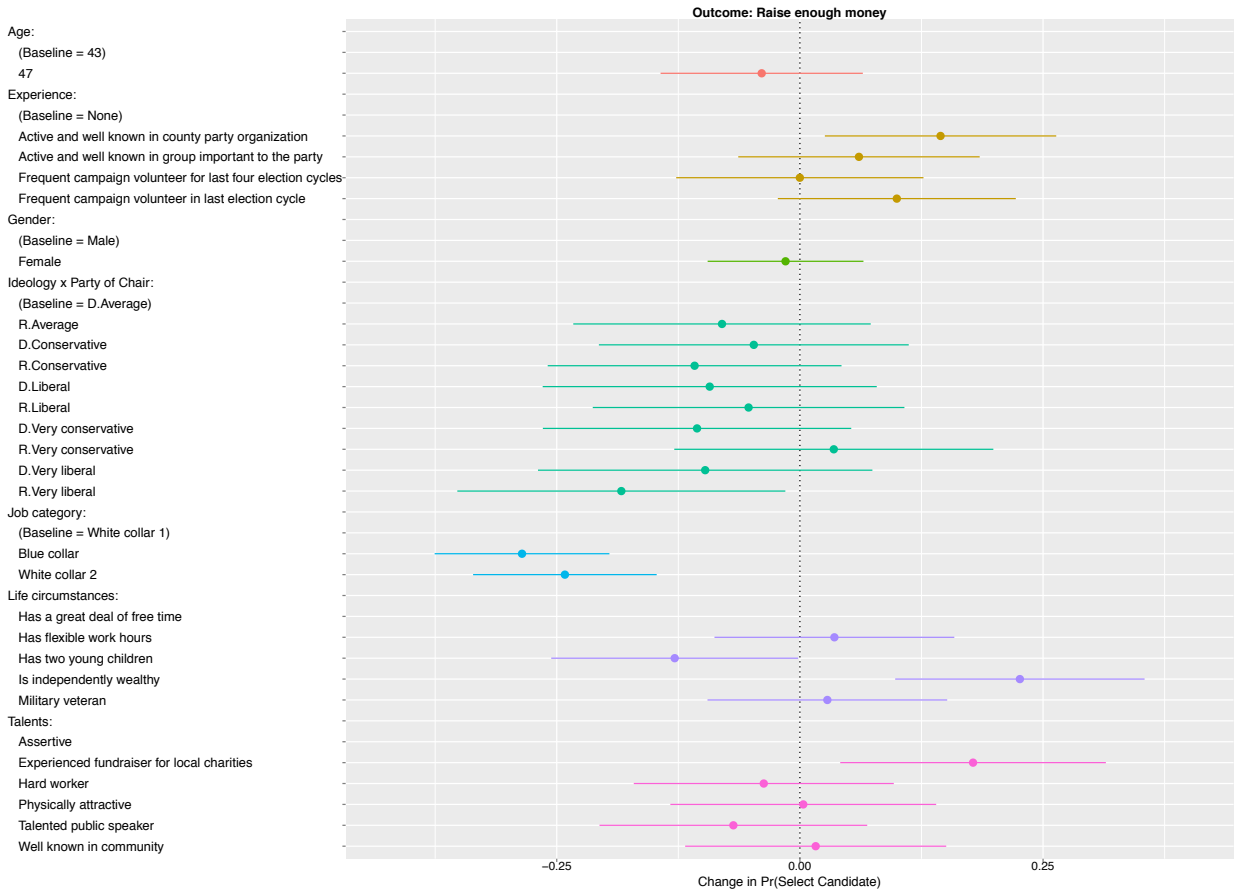
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would you encourage to run?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA28: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties



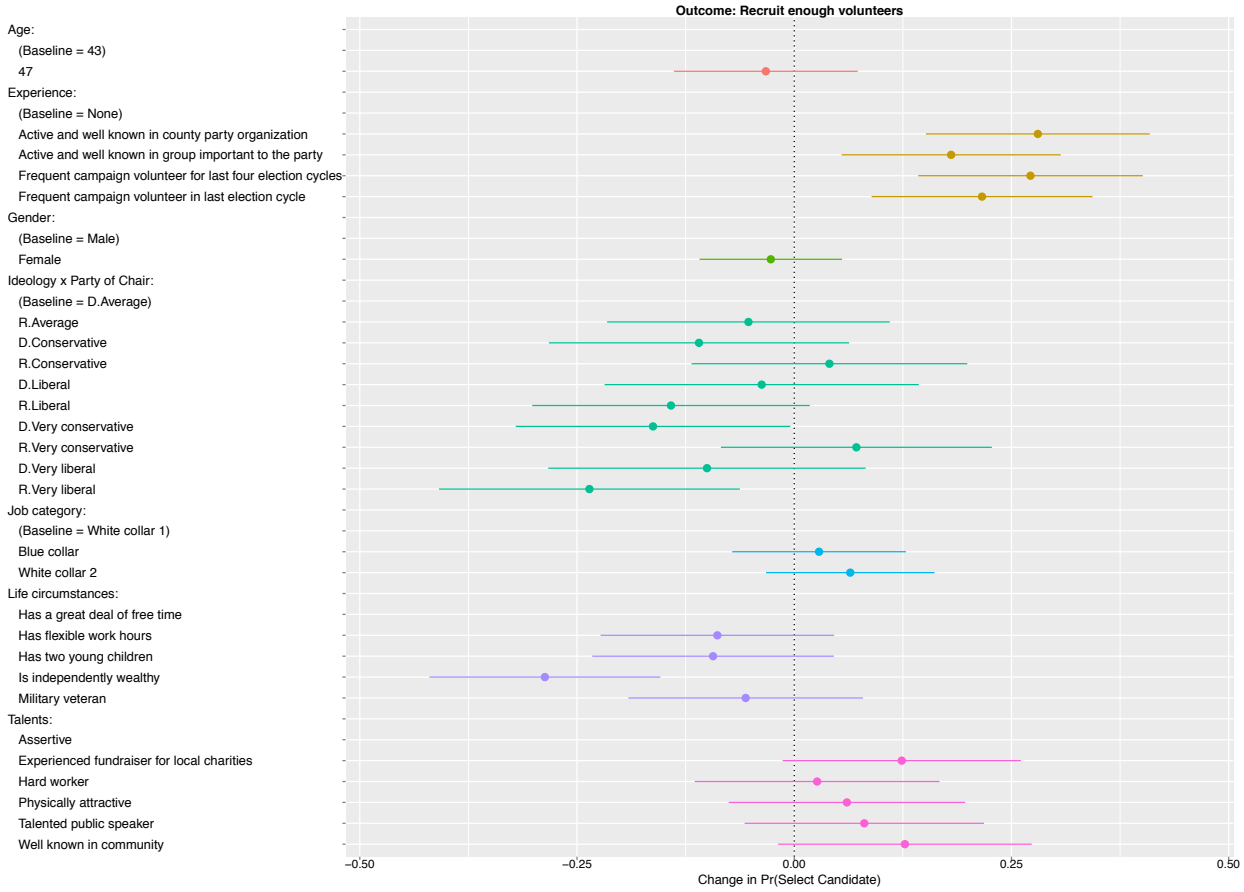
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to win the general election?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA29: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties



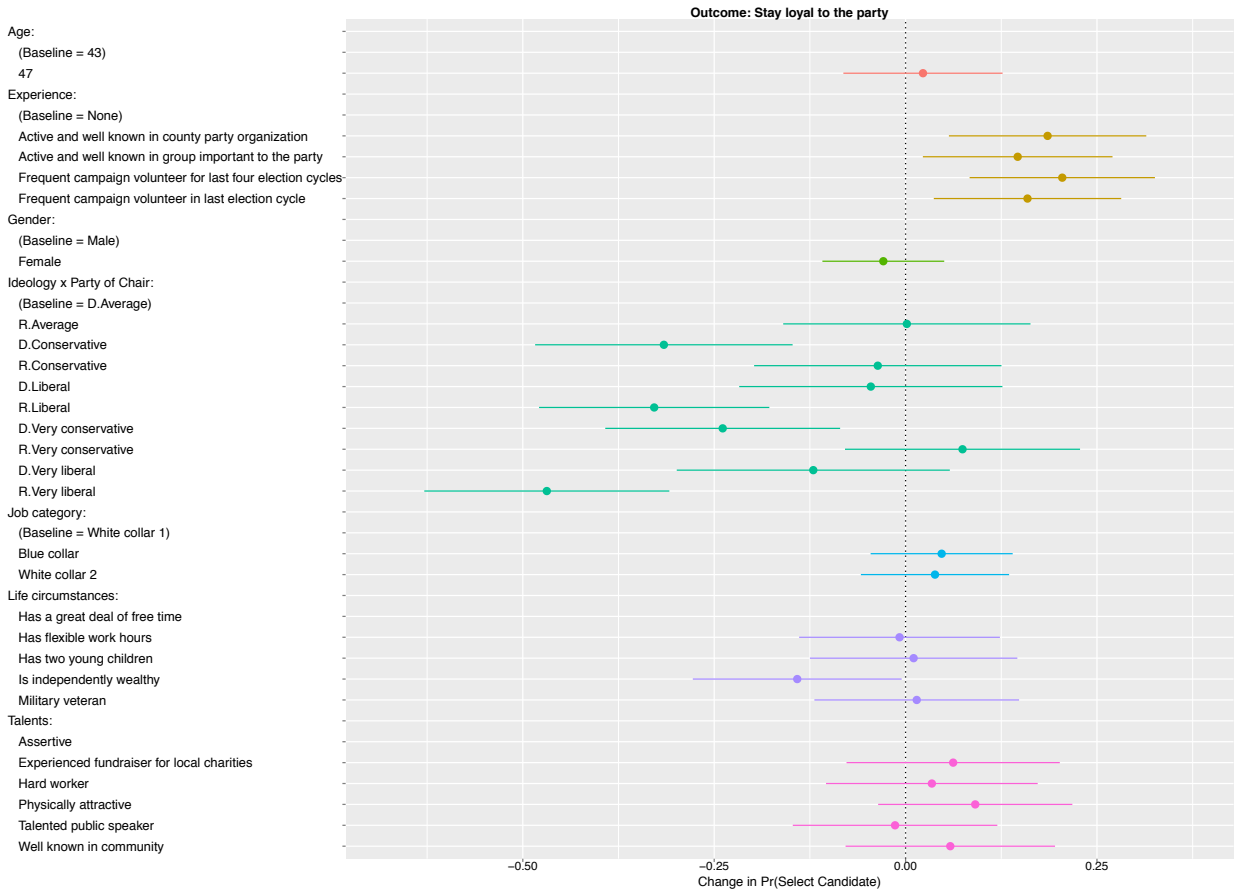
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to raise enough money?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA30: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to recruit enough volunteers?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA31: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties

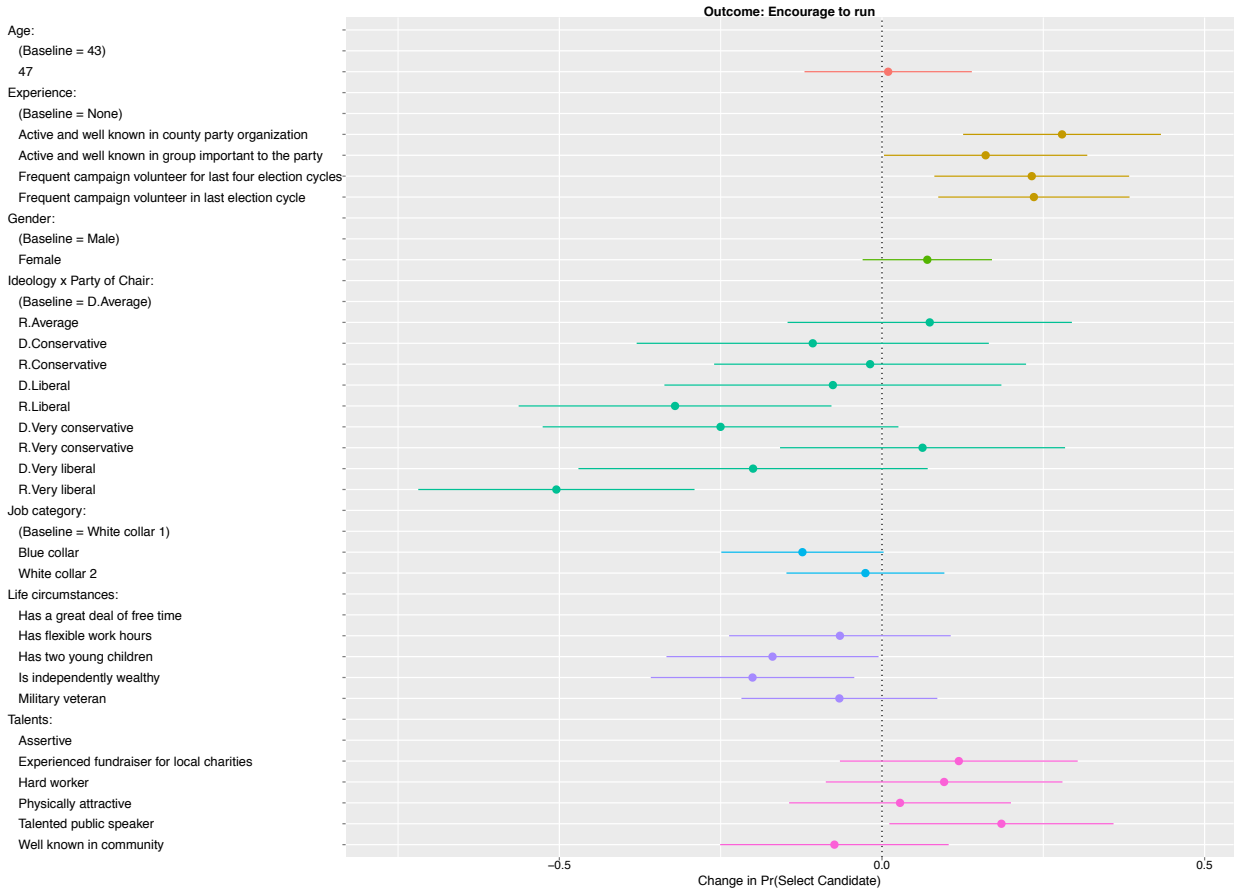


Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who perceive between 26% and 75% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to stay loyal to the party?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

F.6 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where the chair perceives between 76% and 100% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates

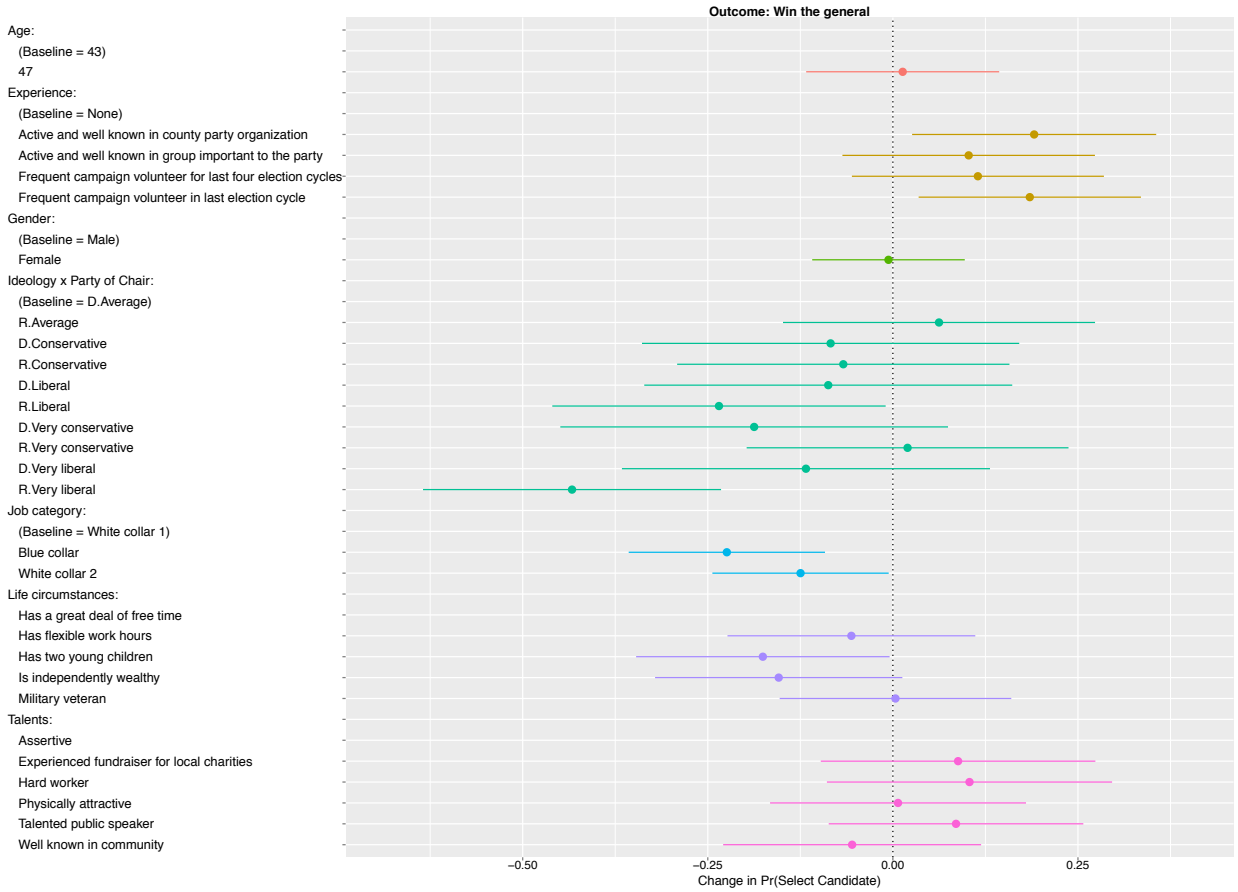
255 respondents are in this category.

Figure OA32: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.



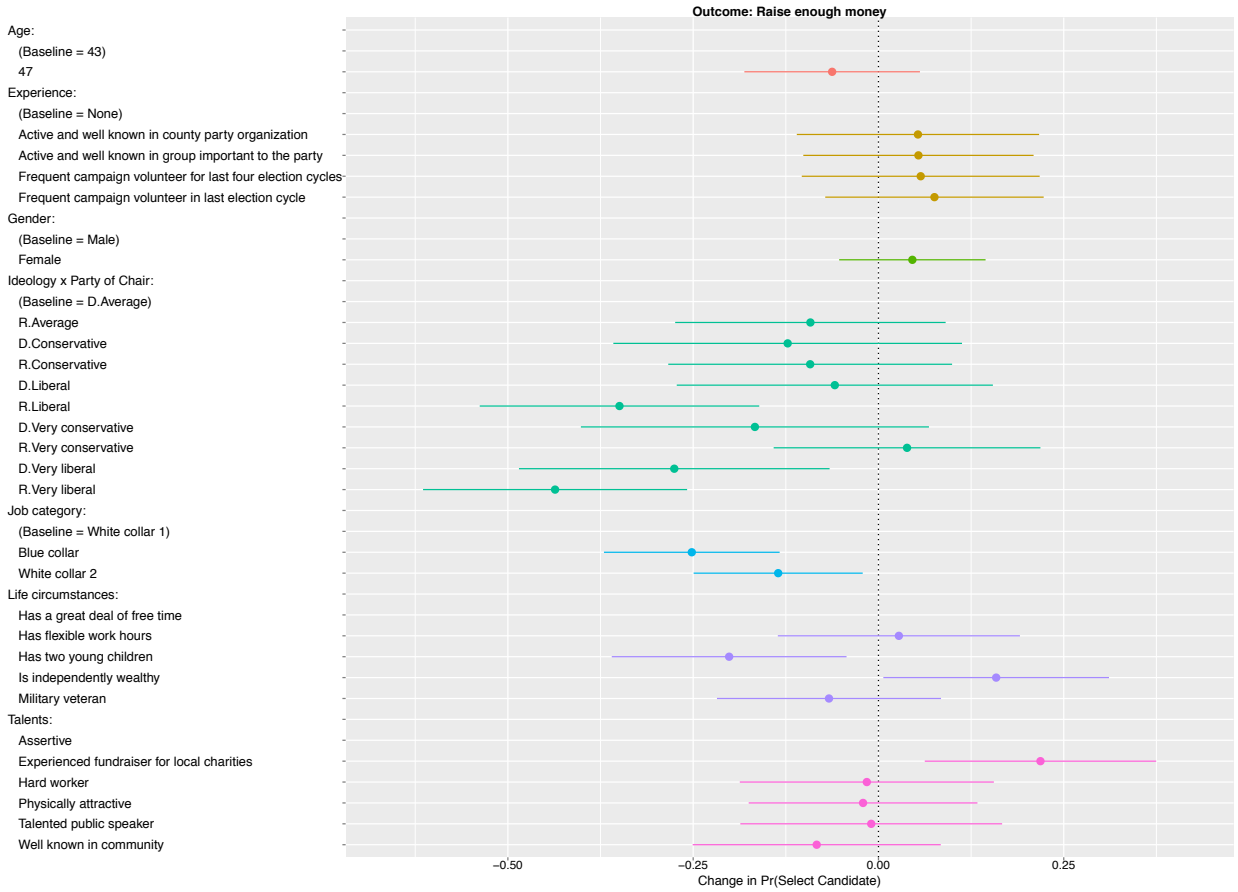
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 76% and 100% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would you encourage to run?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA33: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.



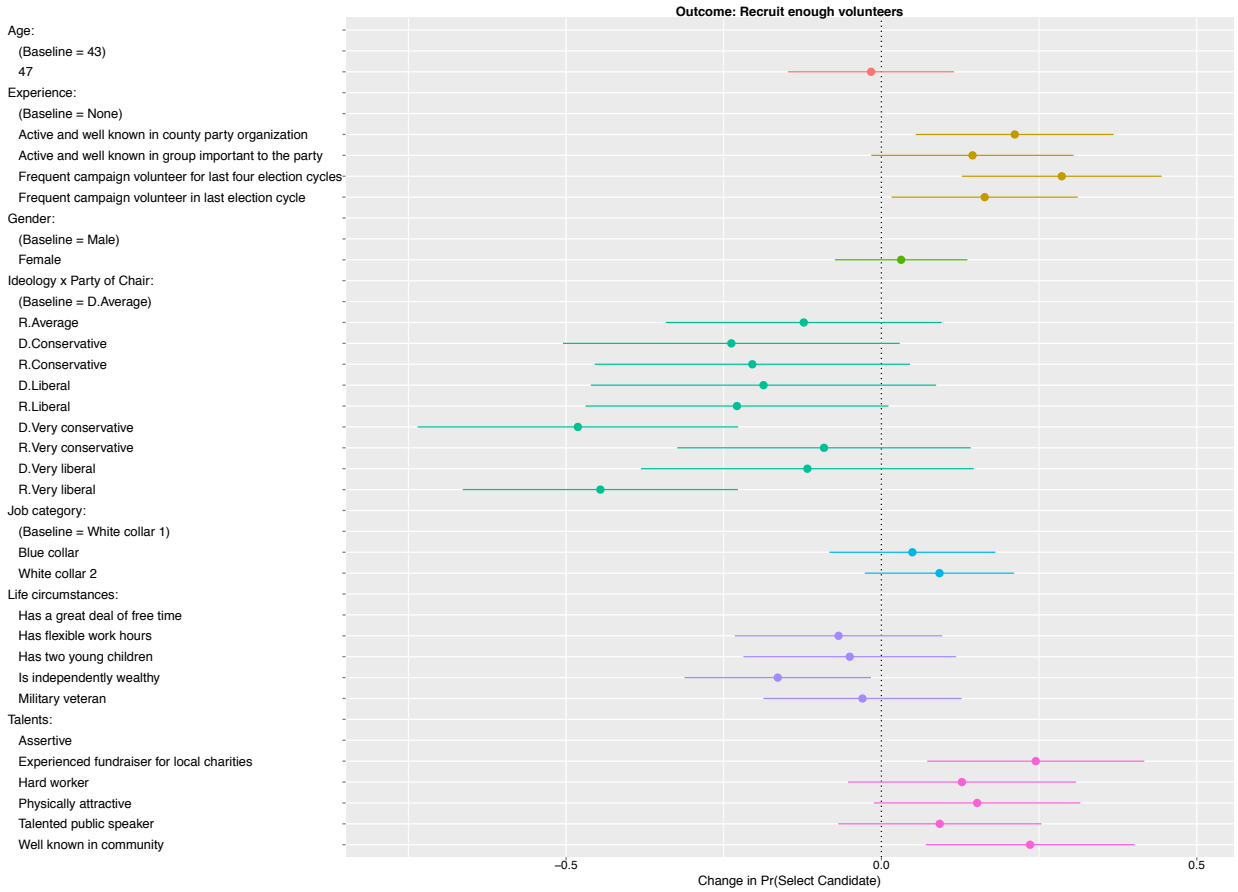
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 76% and 100% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to win the general election?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA34: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.



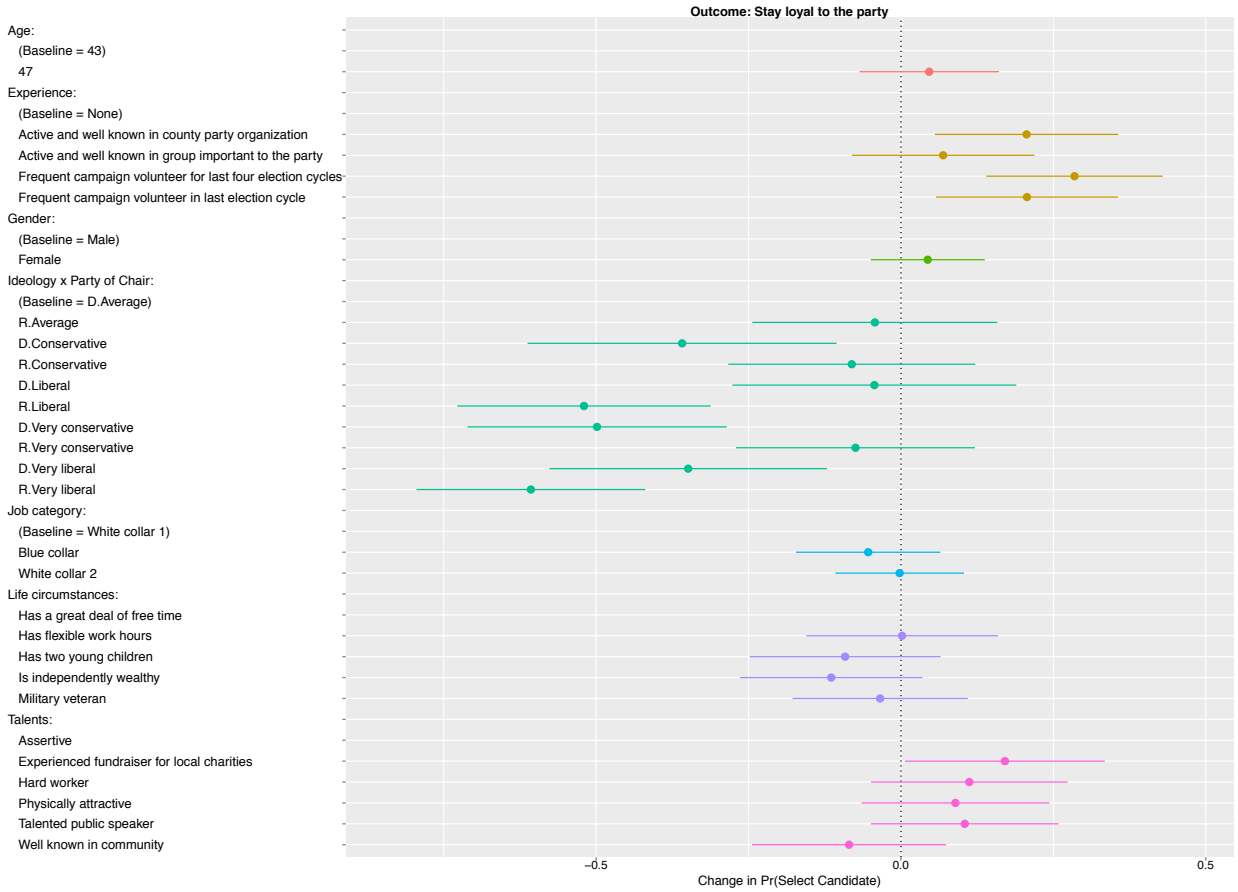
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 76% and 100% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to raise enough money?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA35: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 76% and 100% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to recruit enough volunteers?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA36: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that support the respondent's party.

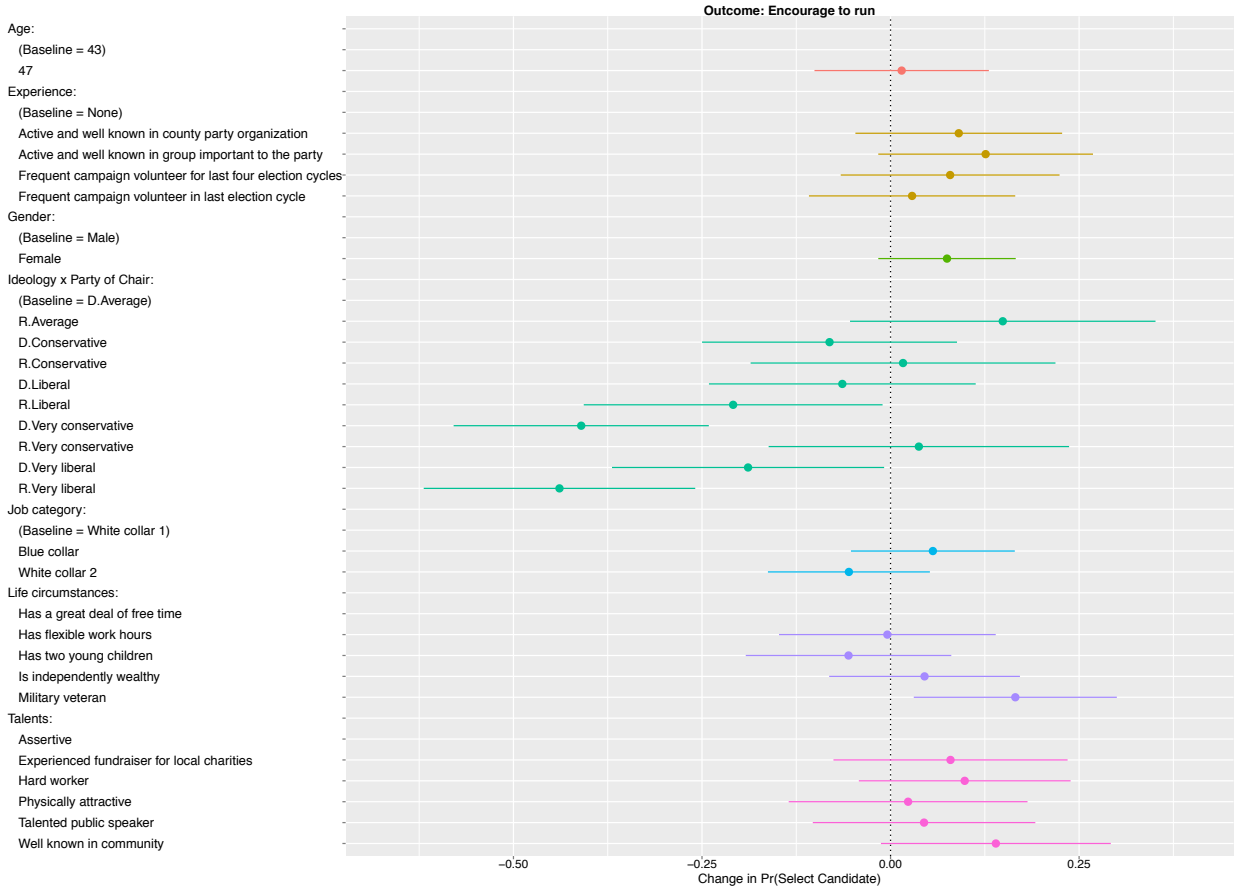


Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 76% and 100% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to stay loyal to the party?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

F.7 All conjoint experiment outcomes: counties where the chair perceives between 0% and 25% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates

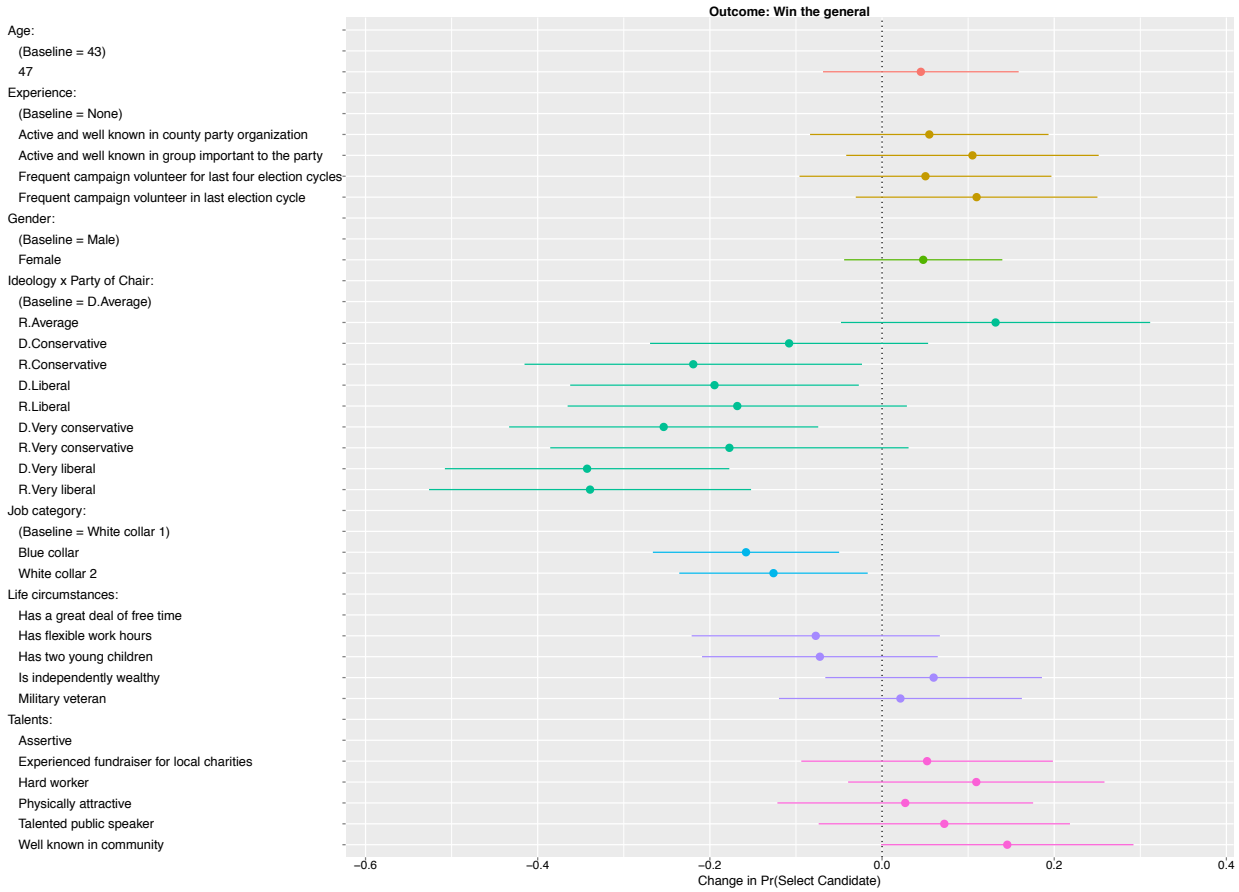
343 respondents are in this category.

Figure OA37: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.



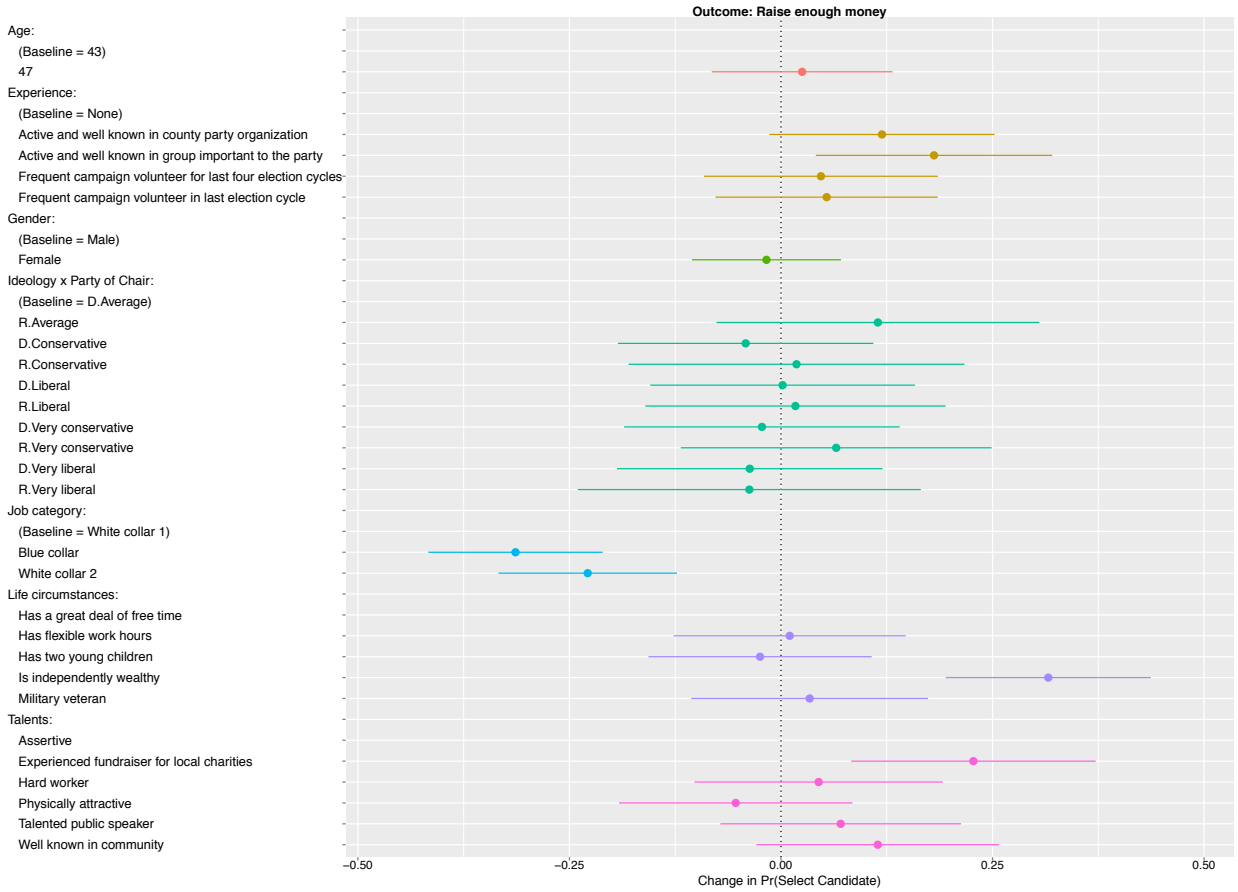
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 0% and 25% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would you encourage to run?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA38: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.



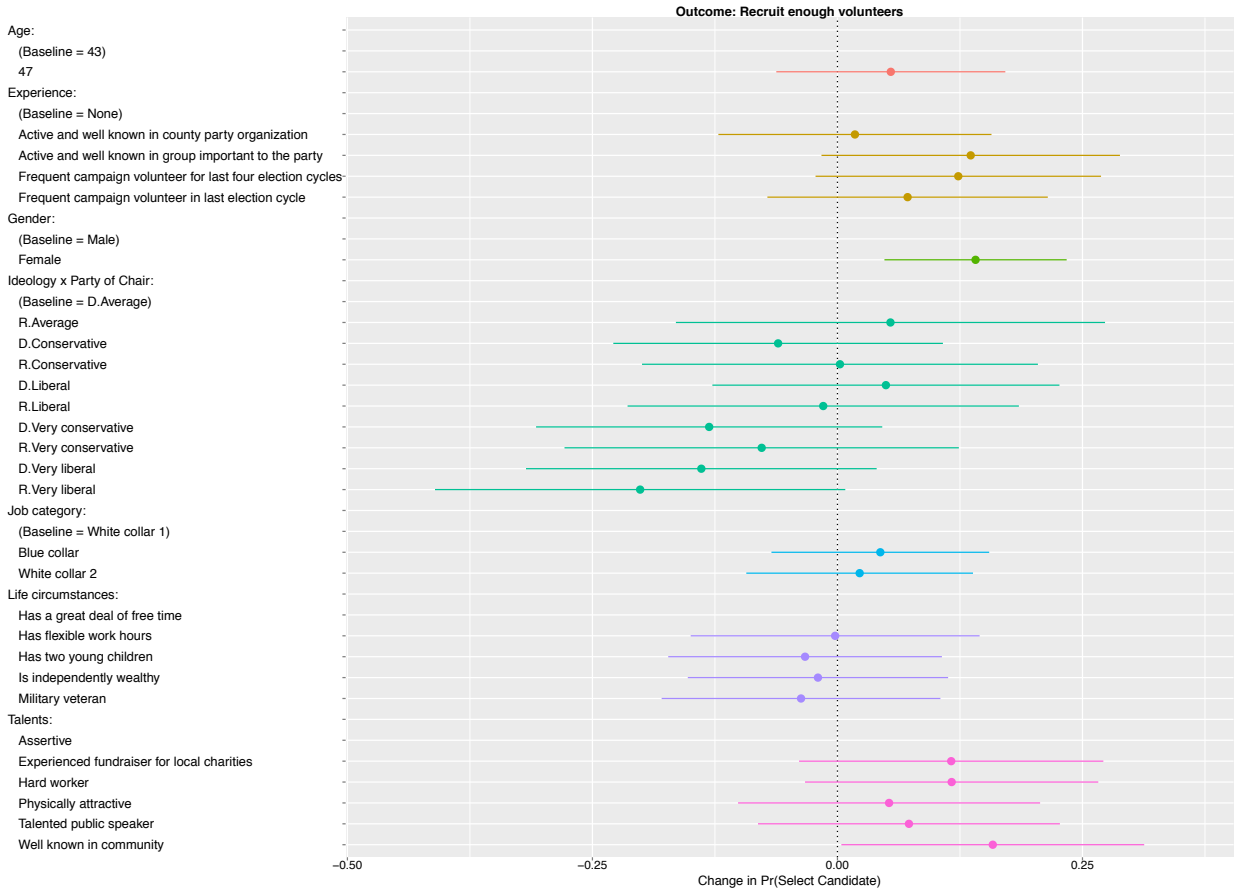
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 0% and 25% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to win the general election?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA39: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.



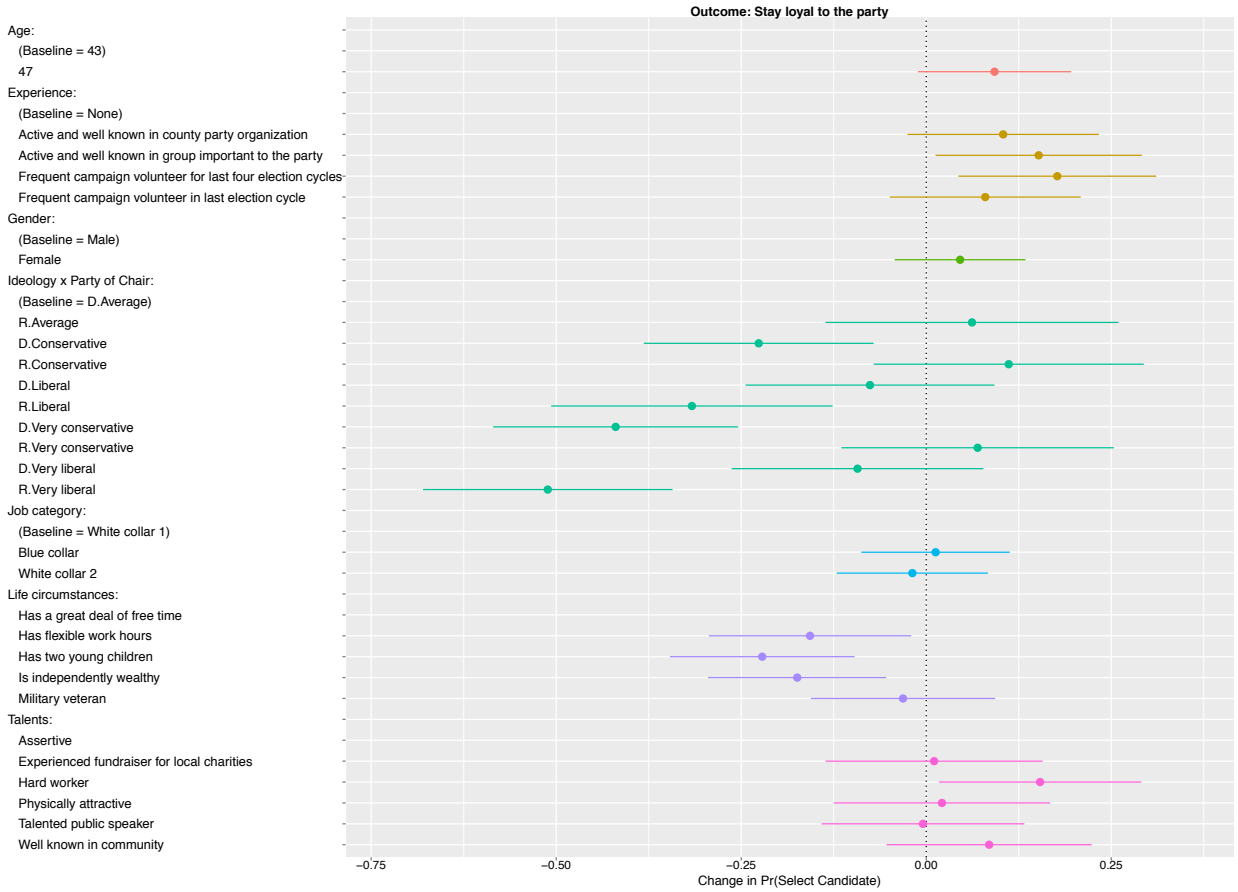
Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 0% and 25% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to raise enough money?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA40: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 0% and 25% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to recruit enough volunteers?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure OA41: Conjoint results: Subjectively competitive counties that oppose the respondent's party.



Note: This figure shows the results from the conjoint experiment for chairs who believe between 0% and 25% of races are safe for his or her party's candidates for the outcome, "which candidate would be more likely to stay loyal to the party?" Points are average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals.